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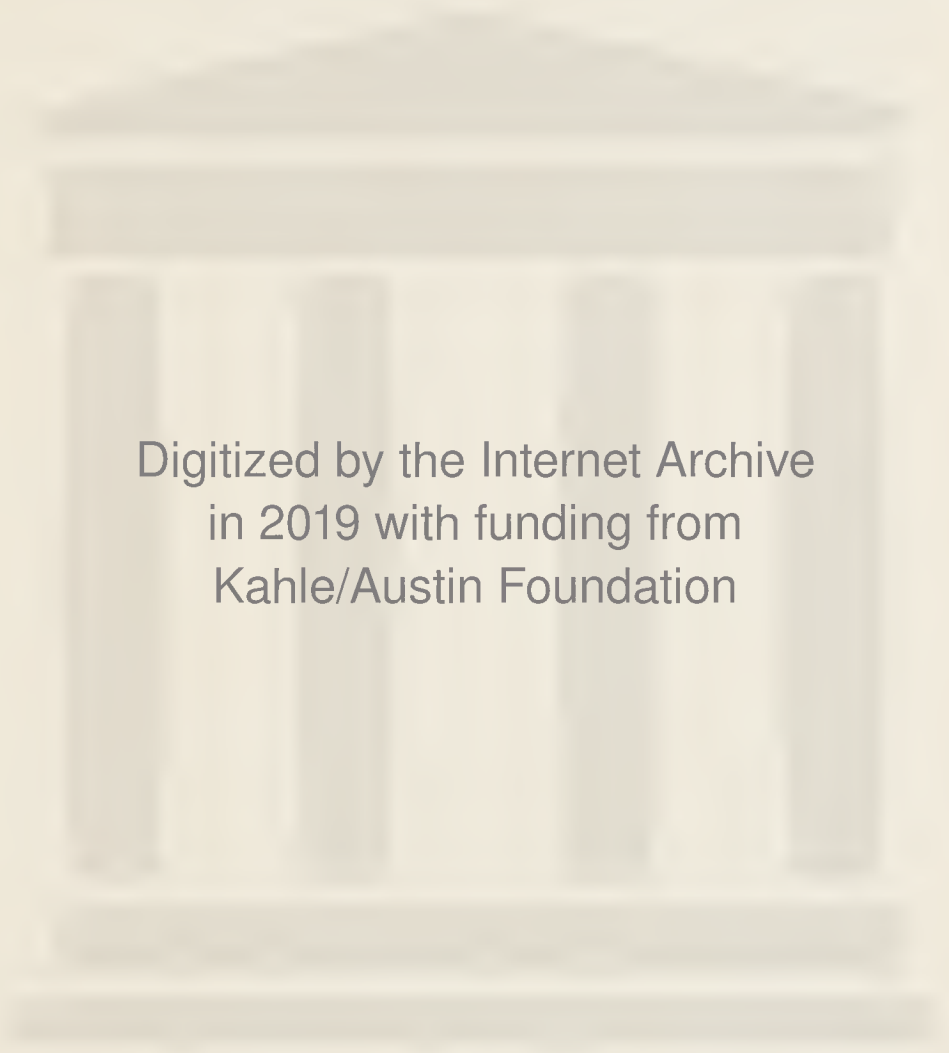


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THE SECRET TRAILS



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"Murray's finger closed, softly and steadily, on the trigger."

The Secret Trails

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THE SECRET TRAILS

By

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The Black Boar of Lonesome Water

I

THE population of Lonesome Water—some fourscore families in all—acknowledged one sole fly in the ointment of its self-satisfaction. Slowly, reluctantly, it had been brought to confess that the breed of its pigs was not the best on earth. They were small, wiry pigs, over-leisurely of growth, great feeders, yet hard to fatten; and in the end they brought but an inferior price in the far-off market town by the sea, to which their frozen, stiff-legged carcasses were hauled on sleds over the winter's snow. It was decided by the village council that the breed must be severely improved.

They were a peculiar people, the dwellers about the remote and lovely shores of Lonesome Water. They were the descendants of a company of Welsh sectarians who, having invented a little creed of their own which was

the sole repository of truth and righteousness, had emigrated to escape the contamination of their neighbours. They had come to Canada because Canada was not crowded; and they had chosen the lovely valley of Lonesome Water, not for its loveliness, but for its lonesomeness and its fertility, and for the fact that it was surrounded by tracts of barren land which might keep off the defilements of the world. Here they devoted themselves to farming and to the contemplation of their own superiority; and having a national appreciation of the value of a halfpenny, they prospered.

As may easily be understood, it was no small thing for the people of Lonesome Water to be forced, by the unanswerable logic of the market price, to acknowledge that their pigs were inferior to the pigs of the ungodly. Of course, there were many in the Settlement who refused flatly to believe that this could be so. Providence could not be so short-sighted as to permit it. But the majority faced the truth with solemn resolution. And Morgan Fluellyn, the hog-reeve of Lonesome Water, was sent to K-ville, to interview the secretary of the provincial

agricultural society, and to purchase—if it could be done at a bargain—some pigs of a pedigree worthy the end in view.

In the eyes of Morgan Fluellyn—small, deep-set, choleric eyes—the town of K-ville, with its almost two thousand inhabitants, its busy picture show, its three pubs, its cheerful, friendly girls, who adorned their hats with lavish flowers and feathers, was a place upon which the fires of an outraged heaven might some day fall. He had no mind to be caught in K-ville at the moment of this merited catastrophe. He lost no time in putting through his business.

When he found the secretary, and learned the price of pedigree pigs, his indignation nearly choked him. With righteous sternness he denounced the secretary, the society, and the Government, and stalked from the office. But an hour in the air brought him to a clearer understanding, and his ambitions on behalf of his community revived. Lonesome Water had the truth. She had a monopoly of the virtues. She should also have pigs that would command these outrageous prices. Why should the ungodly triumph?

And they did not—at least, not altogether.

Morgan Fluellyn was allowed to achieve a bargain. The mollified secretary consented to sell him, at a reduced figure, a big black Berkshire boar, of unimpeachable breeding, but small success in the show-pen, and in temper not to be relied on. The great boar had a steel ring through his snout, and Fluellyn set out with him proudly. Fluellyn was delighted with his prize, but it appeared that his prize was not equally delighted with Fluellyn. In fact, the great grunting beast was surly and cantankerous from the first. He would look at his purchaser with a malign cunning in his eyes, and sometimes make a slash at his leg with gnashing jaws. But Fluellyn was by no means lacking in the valour and pugnacity of his race, and his patience was of the shortest. By means of that rope through his captive's snout, he had an advantage which he knew how to make the most of. The fringe of fiery whisker, which haloed his red, clean-shaven cheeks and chin like a ruff, fairly curled with wrath at the beast's presumption, and he administered such discipline with his cudgel as he felt sure would not soon be forgotten.

After this, for mile upon mile of the lonely backwoods trail, there was peace, and even an apparent unanimity of purpose, between Fluellyn and his sullenly grunting charge. But the great black boar was not really subdued. He was merely biding his time. And because he bided it cunningly, his time came.

The trail was bad, the going hard, for there was no unnecessary travel either way between Lonesome Water and her neighbour settlements. Fluellyn was tired. It was getting along in the afternoon. He sat down on a log which lay invitingly by the side of the trail. From the bag of feed which he carried on his back, he poured out a goodly allowance for the black boar, being not unwilling to keep the brute amiable. Then he seated himself on the log, in the caressing spring sunshine, and pulled out his pipe. For Fluellyn smoked. It was his one concession to human weakness, and it had almost lost him his election as hog-reeve. Nevertheless, he smoked. The air was bland, and he, too, became almost bland. His choleric eyes grew visionary. He forgot to distrust the black boar.

The perfidious beast devoured its feed with noisy enthusiasm, at the same time watching Fluellyn out of the corner of its wicked little eye. When the feed was finished, it flashed about without a ghost of a warning and charged full upon Fluellyn.

Behind the log on which Fluellyn sat the ground fell away almost perpendicularly, perhaps twelve or fifteen feet, to the edge of a foaming brown trout-brook fringed with alders. As the boar charged, Fluellyn sprang to his feet. At the same time he tried to spring backwards. His heels failed to clear the log; and in this his luck was with him, for the boar this time meant murder. He plunged headlong, with a yell of indignation, over the steep. And the animal, checking itself at the brink, glared down upon him savagely, gnashing its tusks.

Fluellyn was quite seriously damaged by his fall. His head and forehead were badly cut, so that his face was bathed in blood and dirt, through which his eyes glared upward no less fiercely than those of his adversary. His left arm was broken and stabbing at him with keen anguish, but he was too enraged to notice his hurts, and if it had

been suggested to him that his fall had saved his life, he would have blown up with fury. He flew at the face of the steep like a wild-cat, struggling to scramble up it and get at the foe. But in this purpose, luckily for him, he was foiled by his broken arm. The boar, too, though eager to follow up his triumph, durst not venture the descent.

For some minutes, therefore, the antagonists faced each other, the boar leaning over as far as he could, with vicious squeals and grunts and slaverings and gnashings, while the indomitable Fluellyn, with language which he had never guessed himself capable of, and which would have caused his instant expulsion from Lonesome Water, defied and reviled him, and strove to claw up to him. At last the boar, who, being the victor, could best afford it, grew tired of the game. Tossing his armed snout in the air, he drew back from the brink and trotted off into the fir-woods on the other side of the trail. Delighted with his first taste of freedom, he kept on for some miles without a halt, till at last he came to a pond full of lily leaves, with soft black mud about its edges. Here he lay down and wallowed till his wrath cooled.

Then he stretched himself in the grass and went to sleep.

As for Fluellyn, his wrath had no excuse for cooling, for the anguish of his hurts at last diverted his attention from it, more or less. He stumbled on down the stream till he reached a spot where he could get up the bank. By this time he was feeling faint, and his angry eyes were half blinded with the blood which he kept wiping from them with his sleeve. Nevertheless, he returned to the scene of his overthrow, and from that point, without a thought of prudence, took up the trail of the boar through the fir thickets. But he was no expert in woodcraft at the best of times, and the trail soon eluded him. Forced at last to confess himself worsted for the moment, he made his way back to the log, snatched up the bag of feed, that his enemy might not return and enjoy it, and with dogged resolution set his face once more toward Lonesome Water.

When he arrived there, he was babbling in a fever. His appearance was a scandal, and his language cleared the village street. There were many who held that he had



"The black boar had wandered so far into the wilderness that he
was safe from pursuit."

The Secret Trails]

gone astray under the wicked influence of K-ville—which was no more than they had always said would happen to a man who smoked tobacco. But the majority were for not condemning him when he was unable to defend himself. For three weeks he lay helpless. And by the time he was well enough to tell his story, which was convincing to all but the sternest of his censors, the black boar had wandered so far into the wilderness that he was safe from pursuit. There were no woodsmen in Lonesome Water cunning enough to follow up his obscure and devious trail.

II

IN spite of the allurements of the lily pool, the black boar forsook it after a couple of blissful days' wallowing. The *wanderlust*, choked back for generations, had awakened in his veins. He pushed on, not caring in what direction, for perhaps a fortnight. Though food was everywhere abundant, he had always to work for it, so he grew lean and hard and swift. The memory of a

thousand years of servitude slipped from him, as it were, in a night, and at the touch of the wilderness many of the instincts and aptitudes of a wild thing sprang up in him. Only the instinct of concealment, of stealth, was lacking to this new equipment of his. He feared nothing, and he hunted nothing more elusive than lily-roots; so he took no care to disguise his movements.

At first, because of the noise he made, the forest seemed to him to be empty of all living things but birds. Then one day, as he lay basking in the sun, he saw a wild-cat pounce upon a rabbit. At first he stared curiously. But when he saw the wild-cat feasting on her prey, he decided that he wanted the banquet for himself. As he burst through the bushes, the great cat stared for an instant in utter amazement, never having seen or dreamed of such an apparition. Then, her eyes like moons, her six-inch bob-tail fluffed to a bottle-brush, and every hair stiffly on end, she bounced into the nearest tree. There in a crotch she crouched, spitting and yowling, while her enemy tranquilly devoured the rabbit. The tit-bit was not altogether to his taste, but he

chose to eat it rather than let the great cat have it. And, after all, it was something of a change from roots and fungi.

Having thus discovered that rabbits were more or less edible, the black boar thenceforward chased them whenever they crossed his path. He never came anywhere near the catching of them, but, in spite of that, he was not discouraged. Some day, perhaps, he would meet a rabbit that could not run so fast as the others.

Fond as the boar was of wallowing in the cool mud of the lily ponds, he was, in reality, a stickler for personal cleanliness. When the mud was dry, he would roll in the moss, and scratch himself till it was all rubbed off, leaving his black bristles in perfect condition. His habits were as dainty as a cat's, and his bed of dead leaves, in the heart of some dense thicket, was always kept dry and fastidiously clean.

One day, as he lay asleep in one of these shadowy lairs, a bear came by, moving noiselessly in the hope of surprising a rabbit or a brooding partridge. A breath of air brought to the great prowler's nostrils a scent which seemed to him strongly out of

place there in the depths of the forest. He stopped, lifted his muzzle, and sniffed critically. Yes, that smell was unquestionably pig. Once he had captured a fat young pig on the outskirts of a settler's farm, and his jaws watered at the delicious remembrance.

Crouching low, he crept up toward the thicket, led by his discriminating nose. His huge paws made no more sound than the gliding of a shadow. Peering in through the tangle of twigs and leafage, he was able to make out some black creature asleep. He paused suspiciously. The pig of his remembrance was white and much smaller than the animal he saw before him. Still, his nose assured him that this was pig all right. His appetite hushed his prudence, and, crashing into the thicket, he hurled himself upon the slumbering form.

And then a strange thing—a most disconcerting thing—happened to him. That slumbering form heaved up beneath him, grunting, and shot out between his hind legs with a violence which pitched him forward on his nose. Before he could recover himself, it wheeled about, looking many

times larger than he had imagined it to be, and charged upon him with an ear-splitting squeal of rage. The shock bowled him clean over, so that he rolled out of the thicket, and at the same time he got a tearing slash down his flank. Startled quite out of his customary pugnacious courage, he bawled like a yearling cub, scrambled to his feet, and took to flight ignominiously. But the unknown fury behind him could run as fast as he, and it clung to his heels, squealing horribly and rooting at his rump with murderous tusks. In a panic he clawed his way up the nearest tree.

Finding himself no longer pursued, he turned and stared down from among the branches. He saw that his victorious adversary was indeed a pig, but such a pig! He felt himself most treacherously ill-used—betrayed, in fact. It was out of all fitness that a pig should be so big, so black, and so abrupt in manners. Had he dared to put the matter again to the test, he might have avenged his defeat, for he was much the heavier of the two, and immeasurably the better armed for battle. But he had no stomach to face that squealing fury again.

He crawled on up to a convenient crotch, and lay there licking his scars and whimpering softly to himself, his appetite for pork entirely spoiled.

The boar, after ramping about beneath the tree for a matter of perhaps a half hour, at last trotted off in disgust, confirmed in his arrogance. This easy victory over so large and formidable a foe convinced him, had he needed any convincing, that he was lord of the wilderness. Had he chanced, about that time, to meet another bear, of sturdier resolution than the first, he would have had a rude disillusionment.

As it was, however, no later than the following day he had an adventure which jarred his complacency. It taught him not exactly prudence, but, at least, a certain measure of circumspection, which was afterwards to profit him. It was just on the edge of evening, when the wilderness world was growing vague with violet shadows, and new, delicate scents were breathing from leaf and bush at the touch of the dew, that the confident wanderer caught sight of a little black-and-white striped animal. It was hardly as large as a rabbit. It was not the

colour of a rabbit. It had by no means the watchful, timorous air of a rabbit. As a matter of fact, it was a skunk ; but his far-off ancestors had neglected to hand down to him any informatory instinct about skunks. He jumped to the conclusion that it was a rabbit, all the same—perhaps the fat, slow rabbit which he had been hoping to come across. He hurled himself upon it with his utmost dash, determined that this time the elusive little beast should not escape him.

And it didn't. In fact, it hardly tried to. When he was within a few feet of it, it jerked its long tail into the air, and at the same time something dreadful and incomprehensible struck him in the face. It struck him in the eyes, the nose, the mouth, all at the same time. It scalded him, it blinded him, it suffocated him, it sickened him. He tried to stop himself, but he was too late. His impetus carried him on so that he trod down and killed the little animal without being aware of it.

In fact, he paid no attention whatever to his victory. All he cared about, for the moment, was breath. His outraged lungs

had shut up tight to keep out the intolerable invader. At last they opened, with a hoarse gasp of protest at being forced to. Having regained his breath, such as it was, he wanted to see. But his eyes were closed with a burning, clinging, oily stuff, which also clung foully in his nostrils and in his mouth. He strove clumsily to rub them clear with his fore-hooves, and, failing in this, he flung himself on his back with head outstretched, and rolled frantically in the moss. Achieving thus a measure of vision out of one inflamed and blurred eye, he caught sight of a marshy pool gleaming through the trees. Gasping, coughing, blundering into tree and bush as he went, he rushed to the water's edge and plunged his outraged features as deep as he could into the cool slime. There he rooted and champed and wallowed till the torment grew less intolerable to all his senses, and his lungs once more performed their office without a spasm.

But still that deadly taint clung nauseatingly to his nostrils and his palate ; and at last, quite beside himself with the torment, he emerged from the water and started on a mad gallop through the woods, trying to run

away from it. He ran till he sank exhausted and fell into a heavy sleep. When he woke up, there was the smell still with him, and for days he could scarcely eat for the loathing of it.

Gradually, however, the clean air and the deodorizing forest scents made him once more tolerable to himself. But the lesson was not forgotten. When, one bright and wind-swept morning, he came face to face with a young porcupine, he stopped politely. The porcupine also stopped and slowly erected its quills till its size was almost doubled. The boar was much surprised. This sudden enlargement, indeed, was so incomprehensible that it angered him. The strange absence of fear in the nonchalant little creature also angered him. He was inclined to rush upon it at once and chew it up. But the fact that its colour was more or less black-and-white gave him a painful reminder of his late experience. Perhaps this was another of those slow rabbits! He checked himself and sniffed suspiciously. The stranger, with a little grumbling squeak, came straight at him—not swiftly, or, indeed, angrily, but with a confident deliberation

that was most upsetting. The boar was big enough to have stamped the porcupine's life out with one stroke of his hoof. But instead of standing up to his tiny challenger, he turned tail and bolted off squealing through the undergrowth as if nothing less than a troop of lions were after him.

III

THE course of the black boar's wanderings brought him out at last upon the desolate northern shores of Lonesome Water. At night he could sometimes see, miles away across the lake, a gleam of the discreet lights of the Settlement—perhaps, indeed, from the windows of Morgan Fluellyn himself, whose cottage was close down on the waterside. This northern shore, being mostly swamp and barren, was entirely ignored by the dwellers in Lonesome Water Settlement, who were satisfied with their own fertile fields, and not of an inquiring temperament. But it offered the black boar just the retreat he was now in search of. Tired of wandering, he found himself a lair in a dense and well-drained thicket near the bank of a lilled

stream which here wound slowly through reeds and willows to the lake.

Here, with food abundant, and never skunk or smell of skunk to challenge his content, he wallowed and rooted the gold-and-green summer away and found life good. He was not troubled by forebodings of the winter, because he had never known anything of winter beyond the warmth of a well-provided pen.

One dreamy and windless afternoon in late September, when a delicate bluish haze lay over the yellowing landscape, a birch canoe was pushed in among the reeds, and a woodsman in grey homespun stepped ashore. He was gaunt and rugged of feature, with quiet, keen, humorous eyes, and he moved in his soft hide "larrigans" as lightly as a cat. He knew of a little ice-cold spring in this neighbourhood not far from the river bank, and he never passed the spot without stopping to drink deep at its preternaturally crystal flow.

He had not gone more than fifty yards up the shore when his eye was caught by a most unusual trail. He stopped to examine it. As he did so, a sudden crash in the bushes

made him turn his head sharply. A massive black shape, unlike anything he had ever seen before, was charging down upon him. Whatever it was—and he remembered a picture he had once seen of a wild boar charging a party of hunters—he knew it meant mischief of the worst kind. And he had left his gun in the canoe. Under the circumstances, he was not too proud to run. He ran well, which was lucky for him. As he swung up his long legs into the branches, the black boar reared himself against the trunk, gnashing his tusks and squealing furiously. The man, from his safe perch, looked down upon him thoughtfully for perhaps a whole minute.

“Well, I’ll be durned!” he ejaculated at last, getting out his pipe and slowly filling it. “Ef t’aint Fluellyn’s pig! To think Jo Peddler ’ld ever have to run from a pig!”

For perhaps a half hour Peddler sat there and smoked contentedly enough, with the patience which the wilderness teaches to all its children. He expected his gaoler to go away and let him make a dash for the canoe. But presently he concluded that the boar had no intention of going away. If so, it

was time to do something if he wanted to get across the lake before dark.

He cleaned the ashes out of his pipe and saved them carefully. Then he refilled the pipe very loosely and smoked it violently half through, which yielded him another collection of pungent ash. He repeated the process several times, till he judged he had enough of the mixture—ash and dry, powdered tobacco. Then, grinning, he let himself down till he was barely out of reach, and began to tease and taunt his gaoler till the surly beast was beside itself with rage, snorting and squealing and rearing itself against the trunk in its efforts to get at him. At length, with infinite pains and precision, he sifted the biting mixture into his adversary's eyes and wide, snorting nostrils. By great good luck he managed to hit the mark exactly. How he wished the stuff had been pepper !

At the result he nearly fell out of the tree with ecstasy. The boar's squeal was cut short by a paroxysm of choking and coughing. The great animal nearly fell over backwards. Then, remembering his ancient experience with the skunk, he rushed blindly

for the water, his eyes, for the most part, screwed up tight, so that he crashed straight through everything that stood in his path, Peddler dropped from his refuge and ran for his canoe, laughing delightedly as he ran. What little grudge he owed the animal for his temporary imprisonment, he felt to have been amply repaid, and he was glad he had not yielded to his first impulse and emptied the hot coals from his pipe into its nostrils.

“I’ll be givin’ yer compliments to Fluellyn,” he shouted, as he paddled away, “an’ likely he’ll be over to call on ye afore long !”

IV

JO PEDDLER had small love for the peculiar community of Lonesome Water. He never visited it except under the necessity of buying supplies for his camp. He used to swear that its very molasses was sour, that its tea was so self-righteous that it puckered his mouth. He never slept under one of its roofs, choosing, rather, to pitch his tent in the patch of dishevelled common on the outskirts of the village.

On the morning after his interview with the black boar, he was making his purchases at the village grocery—a “general” shop which sold also hardware, dry goods, and patent medicines, and gave a sort of disapproving harbourage to the worldly post-office—when Morgan Fluellyn dropped in, nodded non-committally, and sat down on a keg of nails. To Peddler the bad-tempered little Welshman was less obnoxious than most of his fellow-villagers, both because he was so far human as to smoke tobacco, and because his reputation and self-satisfaction had been damaged by the episode of the pedigree boar. There was little tenderness toward damaged goods, or anything else, in Lonesome Water, so the woodsman felt almost friendly toward Fluellyn.

“What’ll ye be givin’ me,” he inquired, proffering his plug of choice tobacco, “ef I git yer pig back fer ye?”

Fluellyn so far forgot himself as to spring eagerly to his feet. His fringe of red whisker fairly curled forward to meet Peddler’s suggestion. If he could restore the precious animal to the community, his prestige would be re-established. Moreover, his own sore shaken

self-esteem would lift its head and flourish once again.

"I'd pay ye right well, Jo Peddler," he declared, forgetting his native prudence in a bargain. "Can ye do it, man?"

"I can that," replied Peddler. And the storekeeper, with a half-filled kerosene tin in his hand, came forward to listen.

"I'm a poor man," went on Fluellyn, recollecting himself with a jerk and sitting down again on the nail keg. "I'm a poor man, as Mr. Perley here'll tell ye, an' I've already had to pay for the pig out o' my own pocket. An' it's cost me a fearful sum for the doctor. But I've said I want the pig back, and I'd pay ye well. An' I won't go back on my word. What'll ye take now?"

"I know ye've been playing in hard luck, Fluellyn," said the woodsman genially, "an' I ain't a-drivin' no bargain. I know what that there pig cost ye down to K-ville. But he ain't no manner o' use to me. He ain't what ye'd call a household pet, as ye'll agree. I'll find him and ketch him an' deliver him to ye, sound in wind an' limb, down here at the landin', if ye'll promise to pay me four

pound fer my trouble when the job's rightly done. An' Mr. Perley here's my witness."

Fluellyn drew a sigh of relief. He thought the woodsman a fool to be so moderate, but he was not without an inkling of the truth that this moderation was due to generosity and kindness rather than to folly. To his amazement, he felt a prompting to be generous himself.

"Tell ye what I'll do," said he, springing up again and grasping Peddler's hand. "If ye'll take me along an' let me help ye fix him, I'll make it five pound instead o' four. He done me bad, an' I'd like to git square."

"All right," said Peddler, with an understanding grin.

On the following morning Peddler and Fluellyn set out for the north shore of the lake. They went in a roomy row-boat, and they carried with them an assortment of ropes and straps. They started very early, just on the edge of dawn; for even here, in Lonesome Water, were to be found certain spirits so imperfectly regenerate as to be not above curiosity, not above a worldly itching to see the outcome of the venture; and

Peddler would have no marplots about to risk the upsetting of his plans.

When they set out, the unruffled surface of the lake lay gleaming in vast, irregular breadths and patches of polished steel-grey and ethereal ice-blue and miraculous violet-silver, so beautiful that Peddler almost shrank from breaking the charmed stillness with his oars, and even Fluellyn felt strange stirrings within him of a long-atrophied sense of beauty. The village of Lonesome Water slumbered heavily, with windows and hearts alike close shut.

The sun was high in the hot blue when the boat, with stealthy oars, crept in among the reeds and made a noiseless landing.

"If ye stir a foot outside the boat till I call to ye, Fluellyn, the bargain's off, an' ye kin ketch the pig yerself," admonished Peddler in a whisper, as he stole up the shore with a coil of ropes over his left arm and a steel-shod canoe-pole in his right hand.

He kept a wary eye on the thicket which he judged to be the black boar's lair, until he was close to the foot of the tree in which he had previously taken refuge. Then he coughed loudly, announcing his presence.

But there was no response from the thicket.

“Come out o’ that, ye black divil, an’ I’ll truss ye up like a bale o’ hay!” he shouted.

As if this inducement was something quite irresistible, came a sudden crashing, not in the thicket he was watching, but in the bushes directly behind him, not a dozen paces away. Without stopping to look round, he dropped his pole and jumped for the tree.

“Bad luck to ye,” he growled, as he gained his perch just in time, “taking a feller by surprise that way!”

As the beast squealed and ramped below, Peddler leaned down from his perch and flicked it smartly with one of his lengths of rope, till it was jumping up and down and almost bursting with rage. Then, securing the rope to a stout branch, he made a slip-knot in the end of it and tried to throw it over the boar’s foreleg. After half a dozen failures, he made a lucky cast and instantly drew the noose tight.

Instead of being daunted at this, the boar again rushed furiously at the tree, rearing himself against it in a repetition of his former tactics. This gave Peddler just the chance he wanted.

"That's where ye've made the mistake, now," said he sympathetically, and dropped another noose well over the beast's snout, beyond the tusks. As he drew it tight, he took up the slack of both ropes in a deft hitch over the branch ; and the boar found itself strung up against the trunk, dancing frantically on its hind legs, and no longer able even to squeal effectively.

"Maybe ye'll be a mite more civil now," mocked Peddler, and dropped lightly from his branch to the ground.

In half a minute he had whipped the frantic boar's two front legs together, also its two hind legs, run a sliding rope from the one pair to the other, and muzzled the formidable jaws more securely with a leather skate-strap. Then he freed the ropes from above and lowered his prisoner carefully to the ground, where it struggled madly till he drew its fore legs and hind legs close together by means of the sliding rope. Thus trussed up, it seemed at last to realize its defeat, and lay still upon its side, breathing heavily, which, indeed, was about the only form of activity left to it. Peddler stood off and surveyed his captive benignantly as

he filled his pipe. "Fluellyn," he called, "ye kin come now an' have a talk with yer pig!"

With a bound, Fluellyn came up the bank, burning to avenge his humiliations, his cheeks glowing in their halo of crisp red whisker. But at sight of the great boar lying trussed up so ignobly his face fell.

"Why didn't ye let me have a hand in the job?" he demanded resentfully.

"Sorry," said Peddler, "but it couldn't be done nohow. Ye'd hev spiled the whole game, an' like as not got yer gizzard ripped. Now ye've got him, I allow ye hain't got nawthin' to grumble at." And he waited curiously to see what the little Welshman would do to relieve his feelings.

But Fluellyn, with all his faults, was not the man to kick a fallen foe. For some moments he eyed the helpless black monster with so sinister a gaze that Peddler thought he was devising some cruel vengeance, and made ready to interfere, if necessary. But all Fluellyn did, in the end, was to go over and seat himself comfortably on the great beast's panting flank and proceed to fill his pipe.

“ It’s goin’ to be a hefty job a-gittin’ him into the boat,” said he at length, sternly repressing the note of exultation that *would* creep into his voice.

The Dog that saved the Bridge

I

THE old canal lay dreaming under the autumn sun, tranquil between its green banks and its two rows of stiffly-rimmed bordering poplars. Once a busy, highway for barges, it was now little more than a great drainage ditch, with swallow and dragon-flies darting and flashing over its seldom ruffled surface. Scattered here and there over the fat, green meadows beyond its containing dykes, fat cows lay lazily chewing the cud.

It was a scene of unmarred peace. To the cows nothing could have seemed more impregnable than their security. Off southwestward and southward, to be sure, the horizon was columned, decoratively but ominously, by pillars of dense smoke, sharp against the turquoise sky. But such phenomena, however novel, failed to stir the

cows to even the mildest curiosity. The spacious summer air, however, was entertaining a strange riot of noises. It thumped and throbbed and thundered. It seemed to be ripped across from time to time with a dry, leisurely sound of tearing. Again, it would be suddenly shattered with enormous earth-shaking crashes. But all this foolish tumult was in the distance, and it gave the cows not the slightest concern. It had not interfered with the excellent quality of the pasturage; it had not disturbed the regularity of milking-time.

Strategically considered, the lazy old canal led from nowhere to nowhere, and the low levels through which it ran were aside from the track of the fighting. The peasant folk on their little farms still went about their business, but very quietly and with lowered voices, as if hoping thus to avoid the eye of Fate.

Along the grass-grown towpath, marching in half-sections, came a tiny detachment of long-coated Belgian riflemen with a machine-gun. The deadly little weapon, on its two-wheeled toy carriage, was drawn by a pair of sturdy, brindled dogs—mongrels, evidently,

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showing a dash of bull and a dash of retriever in their make-up. They were not as large as the dogs usually employed by the Belgians in this kind of service, but they were strong, and keen on their job. Digging their strong toes into the turf, they threw their weight valiantly into the straps, and pressed on, with tongues hanging out and what looked like a cordial grin on their panting jaws. They seemed desperately afraid of being left behind by their quick-marching comrades.

The little band kept well under the trees as they went, lest some far-scouting aeroplane should catch sight of them. In the south-eastern sky, presently, an aeroplane—a Taube—did appear; but it was so distant that the young lieutenant in command of the detachment, after examining it carefully with his field-glasses, concluded that it was little likely to detect his dark line moving under the trees. The Taube, that execrated dove of death, was spying over the Belgian trenches, and doubtless daring a hot fire from the Belgian rifles. Once it made a wide sweep north-westward, rapidly growing larger, and the little band under the trees lay down, hiding themselves and the gun

behind the dyke. Then its flight swerved back over the Belgian lines, and the commander, lowering his glasses with a deep breath of relief, gave the order to march. Two minutes later, around the questing aeroplane appeared a succession of sudden fleecy puffs of smoke, looking soft and harmless as cotton-wool. One of these came just before the nose of the aeroplane. Next moment the machine gave a great swooping dive, righted itself, dived again, and dropped like a stone.

“Thank God for that!” muttered the young lieutenant, and his men cheered grimly under their breath.

Three minutes later the detachment came to an old stone bridge. Here it halted. The men began hastily entrenching themselves where they could best command the approaches on the other side. The machine-gun, lifted from its little carriage, was placed cunningly behind a screen of reeds. The two dogs, panting, lay down in their harness under a thick bush. In an amazingly brief time the whole party was so hidden that no one approaching from the other side of the canal could have guessed there was anything

more formidable in the neighbourhood than the ruminating cows.

The neglected, almost forgotten, old bridge had suddenly leapt into importance. Reinforcements for the sore-pressed division to the south-east were being sent around by the north of the canal, and were to cross by the bridge. The detachment had been sent to guard the bridge at all costs from any wide-roving patrols of Uhlans who might take it into their heads to blow it up. In war it is a pretty safe principle to blow up any bridge if you are quite sure you won't be wanting it yourself. The fact that the other side has spared it is enough to damn it off-hand.

The tumult of the far-off gunfire was so unremitting that the ears of the bridge-guard gradually came to accept it as a mere background, against which small, insignificant sounds, if sudden and unexpected, became strangely conspicuous. The crowing of a cock in the farmyard a few fields off, the sharp cry of a moorhen, the spasmodic gabbling of a flock of fat ducks in the canal—these small noises were almost as clearly differentiated as if heard in a stark silence.

For perhaps an hour the detachment had lain concealed, when those ominous pillars of smoke against the sky were joined suddenly by swarms of the little white puffs of cotton-wool, and the confused noises redoubled in violence. The battle was swaying nearer and spreading around a swiftly widening arc of the low horizon. Then another aeroplane—another bird-like Taube—came in view, darting up from a little south of west. The young lieutenant, in his hiding-place beside the bridge-head, clapped his glasses anxiously to his eyes. Yes, the deadly flier was heading straight for this position. Evidently the Germans knew of that out-of-the-way bridge, and in their eyes also, for some reason, it had suddenly acquired importance. The Taube was coming to see in what force it was held.

“Spies again!” he grunted savagely, turning to explain to his men.

Flying at a height of only five or six hundred metres, the Taube flew straight over them. There was no longer any use in attempting concealment. The riflemen opened fire upon it furiously as soon as it came within range. It was hit several

times; but the Taube is a steel machine, well protected from below, and neither the pilot nor any vital part of the mechanism was damaged. It made haste, however, to climb and swerve away from so hot a neighbourhood. But first, as a message of defiance, it dropped a bomb. The bomb fell sixty or seventy yards away from the bridge back in the meadow, among a group of cows. The explosion killed one cow and wounded several. The survivors, thus rudely shocked out of their indifference, stampeded off down the field, tails in air and bellowing frantically.

"That cooks *our* goose," snapped one of the riflemen concisely.

"Their shells'll be dead on to us in ten minutes' time," growled another. And all cursed soberly.

"I don't think so," said the young lieutenant, after a moment's hesitation. "They want the bridge, so they won't shell it. But you'll see they'll be on to us shortly with their mitrailleuse and half a battalion or so, enough to eat us up. We've got to get word back *quick* to the General for reinforcements, or the game's up."

"I'll go, my lieutenant," said Jean Fer-réol, an eager, dark Walloon, springing to his feet.

The lieutenant did not answer for some moments. He was examining through his glasses a number of mounted figures, scattering over the plains to the rear in groups of two and three. Yes, they were Uhlans unquestionably. The line of combat was shifting eastward.

"No," said he, "you can't go, Jean. You'd never get through. The Bosches are all over the place back there now. And you wouldn't be in time, even if you did get through. I'll send one of the dogs."

He tore a leaf out of his note-book and began scribbling.

"Better send both dogs, my lieutenant," said Jan Steen, the big, broad-built Fleming who had charge of the machine-gun, unharnessing the dogs as he spoke. "Leo's the cleverest, and he'll carry the message right; but he won't have his heart in the job unless you let Dirck go along with him. They're like twins. Moreover, the two together wouldn't excite suspicion like one alone. One alone the Bosches would take

for a messenger dog, sure, but two racing over the grass might seem to be just playing."

"*Bon !*" said the young lieutenant.
"Two strings to our bow."

He hurriedly made a duplicate of his dispatch. The papers were folded small and tied under the dogs' collars. Big Jan spoke a few words crisply and decisively in Flemish to Leo, who watched his lips eagerly and wagged his tail as if to show he understood. Then he spoke similarly, but with more emphasis and reiteration, to Dirck, at the same time waving his arm toward the distant group of roofs from which the detachment had come. Dirck looked anxiously at him and whined, and then glanced inquiringly at Leo, to see if *he* understood what was required of them. He was almost furiously willing, but not so quick to catch an idea as his more lively yoke-fellow. Big Jan repeated his injunctions yet again, with unhurried patience, while his leader fumed behind him. Jan Steen knew well that with a dog, in such circumstances, one must be patient though the skies fall. At last Dirck's grin widened, his tail wagged

violently, and his low whining gave way to a bark of elation.

"He's got it," said Jan, with slow satisfaction. He waved his arm, and the two dogs dashed off as if they had been shot out of a gun, keeping close along the inner base of the dyke.

"Dirck's got it," repeated Jan, with conviction, "and nothing will put it out of his head till he's done the job."

II

SIDE by side, racing wildly like children just let out from school, the two dogs dashed off through the grass along the base of the dyke. Leo, the lighter in build and in colour, and the more conspicuous by reason of a white fore-leg, was also the lighter in spirits. Glad to be clear of the harness and proud of his errand, he was so ebullient in his gaiety that he could spare time to spring into the air now and again and snap at a low-fluttering butterfly. The more phlegmatic Dirck, on the other hand, was too busy keeping his errand fixed in his mind to waste any interest on butterflies, though he was ready enough to gambol a bit whenever

his volatile comrade frolicked into collision with him.

Soon—Leo leading, as usual—they quitted the dyke and started off across the open meadows toward the hottest of the firing. A couple of patrolling Uhlans, some distance off to the right, caught sight of them, and a bullet whined complainingly just over their heads. But the other Uhlan, the one who had not fired, rebuked his companion for wasting ammunition. “Can’t you see they’re just a couple of puppies larking round?” he asked scornfully. “Suppose you thought they were Red Cross.”

“Thought they might be dispatch dogs, Herr Sergeant,” answered the trooper deprecatingly.

“Well, they’re not, blockhead,” grunted the cocksure sergeant. And the two rode on, heading diagonally toward the canal.

The dogs, at the sound of the passing bullet, had crouched flat to the ground. When the sound was not repeated, however, they sprang up and continued their journey, Leo, excited but not terrified, more inclined to frolic than ever, while Dirck, who by some obscure instinct had realized that the

shot was not a chance one, but a direct personal attack, kept looking back and growling at the pair of Uhlans.

But though Leo, the exuberant, gambolled as he ran, he ran swiftly, none the less, so swiftly that plodding Dirck had some trouble to keep up with him. Ten minutes more, and they ran into the zone of fire. Bullets hummed waspishly over them, but, after a moment's hesitation, they raced on, flattening themselves belly to earth. The German infantry were in position, quite hidden from view, some six or seven hundred yards to the right. They were firing at an equally invisible line of Belgians, who were occupying a drainage ditch some three hundred yards to the left. The two dogs had no way of knowing that the force on their left was a friendly one, so they kept straight on beneath the cross-fire. Had they only known, their errand might have been quickly accomplished.

A little farther on, the grass-land came to an end, and there was a naked, sun-baked stubble-field to cross. As the two raced out over this perilous open space, the battle deepened above them. The fire from the Belgian side went high over the dogs' heads,

seeking the far-off target of the enemy's prostrate lines. But the German fire was sighted for too close a range, and the bullets were falling short. Here and there one struck with a vicious spat close to the runners' feet. Here and there a small stone would fly into the air with a sudden inexplicable impulse, or a bunch of stubble would hop up as if startled from its root-hold. A ball just nicked the extreme tip of Dirck's tail, making him think a hornet had stung him. With a surprised yelp, he turned and bit at his supposed assailant. Realizing his mistake in a second, he drooped the injured member sheepishly and tore on after Leo, who had by now got a score of paces ahead.

Next moment a shrapnel shell burst overhead with a shattering roar. Both dogs cowered flat, shivering. There was a smart patter all about them, and little spurts of dust, straw, and dry earth darted upwards. The shrapnel shell was doubtless a mere stray, an ill-calculated shot exploding far from its target. But to Leo it seemed a direct attack upon himself. And well he knew what was the proper thing to do under

such circumstances. Partly by instruction, partly by natural sagacity, he had assimilated the vital precept : " When the firing gets too hot, dig yourself in." With his powerful fore-paws he attacked the stubble, making the dry earth fly as if he were trying to dig out a badger. Dirck watched him wonderingly for a moment or two, till a venomous swarm of bullets just over his head seemed to let light in upon his understanding. He fell to copying Leo with vehement enthusiasm. In a brief space each dog had a burrow deep enough to shelter him. Dirck promptly curled himself up in his, and fell to licking his wounded tail. But Leo, burning to get on with his errand, kept bobbing up his head every other second to see how the bullets were striking.

Another shrapnel shell burst in the air, but farther away than the first, and Leo marked where the little spurts of dust arose. They were well behind him. The rifle bullets pinging overhead were higher now, as the Germans were getting the range of the Belgian line. The coast seemed clear enough. He scrambled from his hole and dashed onward down the field, yelping for Dirck

to follow. And Dirck was at his heels in half a second.

The tiny canal-side village which was the goal of these two devoted messengers was by this time less than a mile away and straight ahead. When they left it with the machine-gun that morning, it had seemed a little haven of peace. Now the battle was raging all about it. The tall church spire, which had risen serenely above its embosoming trees, had vanished, blown off by a shell. A cottage was burning merrily. Those harmless-looking puffs of cotton-wool were opening out plenteously above the clustered roofs. But all these things made no difference to these two four-footed dispatch-bearers who carried the destiny of the bridge beneath their collars. They had been ordered to take their dispatches to the village, and to the village they would go, whether it had become an inferno or not.

But now the spectacle of the two dogs racing desperately toward the village under the storm of lead and shell had caught the attention of both sides. There was no mistaking them now for frolicsome puppies. There was no question, either, as to which

side they belonged to. The German bullets began to lash the ground like hail all about them. Leo, true to his principles, stopped at a tiny depression and once more, with feverish eagerness, began to dig himself in. The earth flew from his desperate paws. In another minute he would have achieved something like cover. But a German sharpshooter got the range of him exactly. A bullet crushed through his sagacious brain, and he dropped, with his muzzle between his legs, into his half-dug burrow.

But Dirck, meanwhile, had for once refused to follow his leader's example. His goal was too near. He saw the familiar uniforms. Above the din he could detect the cries and calls of encouragement from his people. Every faculty in his valiant and faithful being bent itself to the accomplishment of his errand. The bullets raining about him concerned him not at all. The crash of a shrapnel shell just over him did not even make him cock an eye skyward. The shrapnel bullets raised jets of dust before and behind him and on either side. But not one touched him. He knew nothing

of them. He only knew his lines were close ahead, and he must reach them.

The Belgians cheered and yelled, and poured in a concentrated fire on that section of the enemy which was attacking the dog. For a few seconds that small, insignificant, desperate four-footed shape drew upon itself the undivided attention of several thousand men. It focussed the battle for the moment. It was only a brindled dog, yet upon its fate hung immense and unknown issues. Every one knew now that the devoted animal was carrying a message. The Germans suddenly came to feel that to prevent the delivery of that message would be like winning a battle. The Belgians turned a battery from harrying a far-off squadron of horse to shell the lines opposite, in defence of the little messenger. Men fell by the score on both sides to decide that unexpected contest.

And still Dirck raced on, heedless of it all.

Then, within fifty yards of the goal, he fell. A bullet had smashed one of his legs. He picked himself up again instantly and hobbled forward, trailing the mangled limb.

But the moment he fell, a score of riflemen had leapt from their lines and dashed out to rescue him. Three dropped on the way out. Half a dozen more fell on the way back. But Dirck, whining and licking his rescuers' hands, was carried to shelter behind the massive stone wall of the inn yard, where the Brigadier and his officers were receiving and sending out dispatches.

An aide drew the message from under Dirck's collar and handed it, with a word of explanation, to the General. The latter read it, glanced at the time on the dispatch and then at his watch, and gave hurried orders for strong reinforcements to be rushed up to the old bridge. Then he looked at Dirck, whose shattered leg was being dressed by an orderly.

"That dog," he growled, "has been worth exactly three regiments to us. He's saved the bridge, and he's saved three regiments from being cut off. See that he's well looked after, and cured as soon as possible. He's a good soldier, and we'll want him again."

The Calling of the Lop-horned Bull

I

THE harvest moon hung globed and honey-coloured over the glassy wilderness lake. In the unclouded radiance the strip of beach and the sand-spit jutting out from it were like slabs of pure ivory between the mirroring steel-blue of the water and the brocaded dark of the richly-foliaged shore.

Behind a screen of this rich foliage—great drooping leaves of water-ash and maple—sat the figure of a man with his back against a tree, almost indistinguishable in the confusion of velvety shadows. His rifle leaning against the tree-trunk beside him, a long, trumpet roll of birch-bark in his hands, he peered forth through the leaves upon the shining stillness, while his ears listened so intently that every now and then they would seem to catch the whisper of his own blood rushing through his veins. But from the

moonlit wilds came not a sound except, from time to time, that vast, faint, whispering sigh, inaudible to all but the finest ears, in which the ancient forest seems to breathe forth its content when there is no wind to stir its dreams.

Joe Peddler had settled himself in a comfortable position in his hiding-place in order that he might not have to move. He was out to call moose, and he knew the need of stillness. He knew how far and how inexplicably the news of an intruder would travel through the wild; but he knew also how quickly the wild forgets that news, if only the intruder has craft enough to efface himself. If only he keeps quite still for a time, the vigilant life of the wild seems to conclude that he is dead, and goes once more about its furtive business.

Presently Joe Peddler reached out for his rifle and laid it across his knees. Then he raised the trumpet of birch-bark to his lips and uttered through it the strange, hoarse cry of the cow-moose calling to her mate. It was a harsh note and discordant, a sort of long-drawn, bleating bellow; yet there was a magic in its uncouth appeal which made it

seem the one appropriate voice of those rude but moon-enchanted wilds.

Joe Peddler was such an expert with the birch-bark horn that his performance with it could deceive not only the bull, but also the wary cow, or a cow-stalking bear, or, at times, even an experienced and discriminating fellow-woodsman. He would call twice or thrice, and stop and listen for several minutes, confident that on such a glamorous night as this he would not have long to wait for a response to his lying call.

And he had not. When the bull-moose comes to the call of the cow, he comes sometimes noisily and challengingly, with a crashing of underbrush and a defiant thrashing of his great antlers upon branch and tree as he pounds through them. At other times he comes as softly as the flight of an owl.

Peddler looked out upon the empty whiteness of the beach. He dropped his eyes for a second to the velvet shadows beside him, where a wood-mouse, blundering almost upon his outstretched leg, had fled with a tiny squeak of terror. When he looked out again, there in the centre of the beach, black

and huge against the pallid radiance, towered a moose bull, with his great overhanging muzzle uplifted as he peered about him in search of the utterer of that call.

The great bull had a noble pair of antlers, a head for any hunter to be proud of, but Joe Peddler never raised his rifle. Instead of rejoicing at this response to his deceitful lure, a frown of impatience crossed his face. The strict New Brunswick game laws allowed but one bull in a season to fall to the rifle of any one hunter. Joe Peddler was in search of one particular bull. He had no use for the great beast towering so arrogantly before him, and nothing was further from his thoughts than to put a bullet into that wide-antlered head.

The bull was plainly puzzled at finding no cow upon the beach to greet him, after all those calls. Presently he grew angry, perhaps thinking that a rival had reached the scene ahead of him. He fell to pawing the sand with one great, clacking hoof, grunting and snorting so loudly that any rival within half a mile of the spot would have heard him and hastened to accept the challenge. Then he strode up to the nearest

bush and began thrashing at it viciously with his antlers.

The disappointed animal now had his back toward the thicket wherein Peddler lay hidden. Yielding to his humour, the woodsman once more lifted the birch-bark tube to his lips, with a sly grin, and gave another call.

He was hardly prepared for the effect. The bull wheeled like a flash, and instantly, with not a half second's hesitation, came charging upon the thicket at full run.

The situation was an awkward one, and Peddler cursed himself for a blundering idiot. He sprang noiselessly to his feet and raised his rifle. But first he would try an experiment, in the hope of saving the beast from his bullet.

"You git out o' that!" he ordered very sharply and clearly. "*Git*, I tell ye!"

The bull stopped so abruptly that his hooves ploughed up the sand. Decidedly there was something very strange about that thicket. First it gave forth the call of his mate. Then it spoke to him with the voice of a man. And there was something in that

voice that chilled him. While one might, perhaps, count ten, he stood there motionless, staring at the inexplicable mass of foliage. The arrogant light in his eyes flickered down into fear. And then, his heart crumbling with panic, he leapt aside suddenly with a mighty spring and went crashing off through the woods as if all the fiends were clawing at his tail.

Peddler chuckled, stretched himself, and settled down to try his luck again. For another couple of hours he kept it up patiently, calling at intervals, and throwing his utmost art into the modulations of the raucous tube. But never a reply could he charm forth from the moonlit solitudes. At last he grew intolerably sleepy.

"Guess old lop-horn must be off on some other beat to-night," he muttered, getting to his feet with a mighty yawn. "It's me fer me bunk." And with the rifle under one arm, the birch-bark tube under the other, he strode off down the shining beach to the alder-fringed inlet where his canoe was hidden.

As he paddled swiftly through the moonlight down toward the lower end of the lake,

where he had his camp on a high, dry knoll beside the outlet, Peddler mused upon the object of his quest. It was no ordinary moose, however noble of antler, that had brought him out here to the remote and all but unknown tangle of lakes and swamps which formed the source of the north fork of the Ottanoonsis. This bull, according to the stories of two Indian trappers, was of a size quite unprecedented in the annals of the modern moose; and Peddler, who had seen its mighty hoof-prints in the mud beside the outlet, was quite ready to credit the tale. They were like the tracks of a prehistoric monster. But it was not for the stature of him that Peddler was hunting the giant bull. According to the story of the Indians, the beast's antlers were like those of no other bull-moose ever seen. The right antler was colossal in its reach and spread, a foot or more, at least, beyond the record, but quite normal in its shape. The left, on the contrary, was not only dwarfed to less than half the normal size, but was so fantastically deformed as to grow downwards instead of upwards. Of a head such as this, Joe Peddler was determined to possess himself before some

invading sportsman from England or the States should forestall him.

Arriving at the outlet of the lake, he pulled up the canoe at a natural grassy landing-place below his camp, and pushed his way some hundred yards or so along the shore through the bushes to a spring which he had discovered that morning. Your woodsman will go far out of his way to drink at a cold spring, having a distaste for the rather vapid water of the lakes and streams. He threw himself flat upon the stony brink and reached down his thirsty lips.

But just as he swallowed the first delicious gulp of coolness, there came a sudden huge crashing in the brushwood behind him. In one breath he was on his feet. In the next he had cleared the pool in a leap, and was fleeing madly for the nearest tree, with a moose that looked as big as an elephant at his heels.

The nearest tree, a young birch, was not as big as he could have wished, but he was not taking time just then to pick and choose. He whirled himself round the trunk, sprang to the first branch, swung up, and scrambled desperately to gain a safe height. He gained

it, but literally by no more than a hair's breadth. As the black monster reached the tree, it checked itself abruptly, and in almost the same instant lifted its right fore-hoof high above its head and struck like a flash at Peddler's foot just disappearing over a branch. It missed the foot itself, but it shaved the stout cowhide larrigan that covered the foot, slicing it as if with a knife. Peddler drew himself farther up and then looked down upon his assailant with interest.

"I guess I've found ye all right, old lop-horn," he drawled, and spat downward, not scornfully, but contemplatively, as if in recognition, upon that strangely stunted and deformed left antler. "But gee! Them Injuns never said nothin' about yer bein' so black an' so almighty spry. I wisht, now, ye'd kindly let me go back to the canoe an' git me gun!"

But any such quixotic courtesy seemed far from the giant's intention. As soon as he realized that his foe was beyond the reach of striking hoof or thrusting antler, he set himself, in the pride of his strength and weight, to the task of pushing the tree over. Treating it as if it were a mere sapling, he

reared himself against it, straddling it with his fore-legs, and thrust at it furiously in the effort to ride it down. As the slim young trunk shook and swayed beneath the passion of the onslaught, Peddler clung to his perch with both arms and devoutly wished that he had had time to choose a sturdier refuge.

For perhaps five minutes the giant pushed and battered furiously against the tree, grunting like a locomotive and tearing up the earth in furrows with his hinder hooves. At length, however, he seemed to conclude that this particular tree was too strong for him. He backed off a few yards and stood glaring up at Peddler among the branches snorting contemptuously and shaking his grotesquely misshapen antlers as if daring his antagonist to come down. Peddler understood the challenge just as clearly as if it had been expressed in plainest King's English.

"Oh, yes," said he grimly, "I'll come down all right, bime-by. An' ye ain't agoin to like it one leetle bit when I do; now mind, I'm tellin' ye!"

For perhaps a half-hour the giant bull continued to rave and grunt and paw about the tree with a tireless vindictiveness which

filled his patient prisoner with admiration, and hardened him inexorably in his resolve to possess himself of that unparalleled pair of antlers. At last, however, the furious beast stopped short and stood motionless, listening intently. Peddler wondered what he was listening to. But presently his own ears also caught it—the faint and far-off call of a cow-moose from the upper end of the lake. Forgetting his rage against Peddler, the bull wheeled about with the agility of a cat and went crashing off up the lake shore as fast as he could run. Stiff and chilled—for the air of that crisp October night had a searching bite in it—Peddler climbed down from his perch. First, being tenacious of purpose, he hurried to the spring and finished his interrupted drink. Then, returning to the canoe, he stood for a few moments in hesitation. Should he follow up the trail at once? But it was already near morning, and he was both dead-tired and famished. He believed that the bull, not being in any alarm, would not journey far that night after meeting his mate, but rather would seek some deep thicket for a few hours' sleep. He picked up the rifle and strode off to his camp, resolved

to fortify himself well for a long trail on the morrow.

II

WISE though Peddler was in the ways of the wild folk, he found himself at fault in regard to this particular bull, whose habits seemed to be no less unique than his stature, and his antlers. Taking up the trail soon after sunrise, he came in due time to the spot, near the head of the lake, where the bull had joined the calling cow. From this point the trail of the pair had struck straight back from the lake towards the range of low hills which formed the watershed between the eastern and the south-westward flowing streams. About noon Peddler came to the place where the cow, wearied out by so strenuous a pace, had lain down to sleep in a thicket. The bull, however, driven by his vehement spirit, had gone on without a pause.

All day Peddler followed doggedly upon that unwavering trail. He crossed the ridge, descended to the broken and desolate eastern levels, and came, towards sunset, upon another wide and tranquil lake. Feeling

sure that his quarry, unaware of the pursuit, would linger somewhere about this pleasant neighbourhood, Peddler found himself a mossy nest on the cup-shaped top of a boulder and settled down for a couple of hours' sleep. He little guessed that the bull, having doubled back on a parallel with his own trail, had been following him stealthily for a good half hour, not raging now, but consumed with curiosity.

Just as the moon was rising over the low black skyline, jagged with fir-tops, Peddler woke up. Creeping through the bushes, he betook himself to a hiding-place which his quick eye had already marked down, close to the beach, a roomy, flat ledge at the foot of a rock, with a screen of young spruce before it. From behind another clump of spruce, not fifty paces distant, the lop-horned bull, standing moveless as a dead tree, watched him with an intense and inquiring interest. His fury of the preceding night, and even the memory of it, seemed to have been blotted from his mind.

But when, a few minutes later, from that shadowy covert, where he could just make out the crouching form of the man, the call of a cow breathed forth upon the stillness,

the great bull's eyes and nostrils opened wide in amazement. What could a moose-cow be thinking about to remain so near the dangerous neighbourhood of a man? But, no, his eyes assured him that there was no cow in the man's hiding-place. Where, then, could she be? He stared around anxiously. She was nowhere in sight. He sniffed the windless night air. It bore no savour of her. He waved forward his great, sensitive ears to listen. And again came the call, the voice, undoubtedly, of the moose-cow.

There could be no question about it this time. It came from the thicket. Had there been any least note of fear in that call, the giant bull would have rushed at once to the rescue of the unseen fair, concluding that the man had her hidden. But now, the utterance was simply that of an untroubled cow. Therefore, for the moment, the great bull was chiefly puzzled. Keeping within the shadows, and moving as imperceptibly as if he were himself but one of the blackest of them, he stole nearer and nearer yet, till he could plainly see every detail within the man's hiding-place. There was assuredly nothing there but rock and moss and bush and the

crouching figure of the man himself, staring forth upon the moonlit beach and holding a curious roll of bark to his mouth. Nevertheless, in that same moment there came again the hoarse cry of the cow.

It came indisputably from that crouching form of a man, from that roll of bark at the man's mouth.

This was a mystery, and the wiry black hair along the neck and shoulders of the bull began to rise ominously. A slow, wondering rage awoke in his heart. It was that element of wonder alone which for the moment restrained him from rushing forward and trampling the mysterious cheat beneath his hooves. A red spark kindled in his eyes.

All undreaming of the dread watcher so close behind him, Peddler set his lips to the lying tube of bark and gave his call again and yet again, with all the persuasiveness of his backwoods art. He felt sure that his efforts were convincing. They were, indeed, all of that. They were so consummate a rendering of the cow-moose's voice that they perfectly convinced a huge and hungry bear, which was at that moment creeping up from

the other side of the rock upon the unsuspecting hunter's hiding-place.

The bear knew that its only chance of capturing so swift and nimble a quarry as the moose-cow lay in stealing upon her like a cat and taking her by surprise in one instantaneous rush. He never doubted for a moment that the cow was there behind the rock. When he was within a dozen feet of those persuasive sounds, his crouched form suddenly rose up, elongated itself like a dark and terrible jack-in-the-box, and launched itself with a swish through the encircling branches.

Before Peddler's wits had time fully to take in what was happening, his trained instinct told him what to do. Half rising to his feet as he snatched up his rifle, he swung about and fired from the hip at the vague but monstrous shape which hung for an instant above him. The shot went wide, for just as his finger pressed the trigger, a great black paw smote the weapon from his grasp and hurled it off among the bushes.

With a contortion that nearly dislocated his neck, Peddler hurled himself frantically

backwards and aside, and so just escaped the pile-driver descent of the other paw.

He escaped it for the instant ; but in the effort he fell headlong, and jammed himself in a crevice of the rock so awkwardly that he could not at once extricate himself. He drew up his legs with an involuntary shudder, and held his breath, expecting to feel the merciless claws rake the flesh from his thighs.

But nothing touched him ; and the next moment there broke out an astounding uproar behind him, a very pandemonium of roars and windy gruntings, while the crashing of the bushes was as if the forest were being subdued beneath a steam-roller. Consumed with amazement, he wrenched himself from the crevice and glanced round. The sight that met his eyes made him clamber hastily to the top of the rock, whence he might look down from a more or less safe distance upon a duel of giants such as he had never dared hope to witness.

When the bear found that it was no cow-moose, but a man that he was springing upon, he was so taken aback that, for a second or two, he forbore to follow up his

advantage. To those two seconds of hesitation Joe Peddler owed his escape.

Before the massive brute, now boiling with rage at having been so deceived, had sufficiently made up his mind to fall upon that prostrate figure in the crevice, something that seemed to him like a tornado of hooves and antlers burst out of the bushes and fell upon him. The next moment, with a long, red gash half-way down his flank, he was fighting for his life.

The gigantic moose had been just upon the verge of rushing in to silence those incomprehensible and deceiving calls, when the towering form of the bear burst upon his vision. Here at last was something to focus his wrath. Already angry, but still dampened by bewilderment, his anger now exploded into a very madness of rage. There was the ancient, inherited feud between his tribe and all bears. As a youngster, he had more than once escaped, as by a miracle, from the neck-breaking paw of a bear, had more than once seen a young cow struck down and ripped to pieces. Now to this deep-seated hate was added another incentive. His mind confused by fury to protect his

mate, he dimly felt that the mystery which had been tormenting him was the fault of this particular bear. The man was forgotten. A cow had been calling to him. She had disappeared. Here was the bear. The bear had probably done away with the cow. The cow should be terribly avenged.

The bear—which was one of the biggest and fiercest of his kind in all the northern counties—had fought moose, both bulls and cows, before. But he had never before faced such an antagonist as this one, and that first slashing blow from the bull's knife-edged fore-hoof had somewhat flurried him. Sitting back poised, with his immense hind-quarters gathered under him and his fore-paws uplifted, he parried the smashing strokes of his assailant with the lightning dexterity of a trained boxer. His strength of shoulder and forearm was so enormous that if he could have got a stroke in flat, at right angles to the bone, he would have shattered the bull's leg to splinters. But his parrying blows struck glancingly, and did no more than rip the hair and hide.

After a few minutes of whirlwind effort to batter down that impregnable guard, the

bull jumped back as nimbly, for all his bulk, as a young doe startled from her drinking. His usual method of attack, except when fighting a rival bull, was to depend upon his battering fore-hooves. But now he changed his tactics. Lowering his head so that his vast right antler stood out before him like a charge of bayonets, he launched himself full upon his adversary.

With all his weight and strength behind it, that charge was practically irresistible, if fairly faced. But the bear was too wise to face it fairly. He swung aside, clutched the lowered antler, and held fast, striving to pull his enemy down.

But the bull's strength and impetus were too great, and the bear was himself thrown off his balance. Even then, however, he might probably have recovered himself and once more established the battle upon even terms. But he had not reckoned—he could not have been expected to reckon—upon the unprecedented weapon of that little down-drooping left antler. Not for nothing was the giant bull lop-horned. The dwarfed and distorted antler hung down like a plough-share. And the bear attempted no defence

against it. Keen-spiked, it caught him in the belly and ploughed upward. In a paroxysm he fell backwards. The bull, swinging his hindquarters around without yielding his advantage for a second, lunged forward with all his force, and the deadly little plough was driven home to the bear's heart.

Peddler, from his post on top of the rock, shouted and applauded in wild excitement, and showered encomiums, no less profane than heartfelt, upon the victorious bull. For a minute or two the bull paid no attention, being engrossed in goring and trampling his victim in an effort to make it look less like a bear than an ensanguined floor-rug. At last, as if quite satisfied with his triumph, he lifted his gory head and eyed that voluble figure on top of the rock. It looked harmless.

"Gee, but ye kin fight!" said Peddler, glowing with admiration. "An' ye've saved my scalp fer me this night, fer sartain. Guess I'll hev to let ye keep them lop-sided horns o' yourn, after all!"

The bull snorted at him scornfully and turned his head to take another prod at the unresponsive remnants of his foe. Then, paying no further heed to the man on the

rock, and craving assuagement to the fiery smart of his wounds, he strode down into the lake and swam straight out, in the glitter of the moon-path, toward the black line of the farther shore.

The Fisher in the Chutes

HE was plainly a duck. The most casual and uninitiated of observers would have said so at a glance. Yet not the most stupidly casual could have taken him for any ordinary duck. He was too imposing in appearance, too gorgeous in apparel, too bold and vigilant in demeanour to be so misunderstood. Moreover, he was not in the situation or the surroundings which one is wont to associate with ducks.

In fact, after the fashion of a cormorant or a kingfisher, he was perched motionless on a big dead stub of a branch. This branch was thrust out very obligingly in just the place where this most singular of ducks would have desired it if he had been consulted in the matter. It directly overhung a transparent amber-brown chute of unbroken water in the midst of the loud turmoil of North Fork

Rapids. The strange-mannered duck had no proper talons wherewith to grasp his perch, but his strong clawed webs held him steadily, none the less, as he peered downward into the clear rush of the torrent.

The duck was a handsome male of the red-breasted merganser family, and the absorbing interest of his life was fish. It was not in the quiet pools and long, deep reaches of dark water that he loved to seek his prey, but rather to snatch it from the grasp of the loud chutes and the roaring rips. Here, where the North Fork stream fell into the Ottanoonsis, was a resort exactly to his liking. And most of the fish—trout, salmon, grilse, or parr—which journeyed up and down either the Fork or the parent river chose to pass through that sluice of swift but unbroken flow immediately beneath the overhanging branch on which he perched.

For all the splendour of his plumage, the merganser was not conspicuous where he sat. All about him was a tumult of bright and broken colour, scattered in broad splashes. The rapids were foam-white, or golden ruddy, or deep, shining green-brown under the sharp and patchy sunlight, and they were sown

thickly with wet black rocks, here and there glinting with purple. The merganser had a crested head of iridescent green-black, a broad collar of lustrous white, black back, black-and-white wings, white belly, sides finely pencilled in black and white, and a breast of rich chestnut red streaked with black. His feet were red, his long narrow beak, with its saw-toothed edges and sharp hooked tip, was bright red. In every line and hue he was unmistakably an aristocrat among ducks, and an arrogant one at that.

His fierce red eyes, staring down fixedly into the flowing amber of the current, marked piercingly every fish that passed up and down. Most of them were much too big, not for his appetite, but for his powers. His beak, with its keen-toothed edges, was a formidable weapon, by means of which he could doubtless have captured, disabled, and dragged to shore even a fish of a pound or so in weight. But here he was at a terrible disadvantage as compared with the owls, hawks and eagles. He had no rending claws. Had he taken such a prize, he could not have profited by it, having no means of tearing it to pieces. He had no use for fish too big to be swallowed

whole ; so he was obliged to watch greedily and savagely the great salmon, the grilse, and the larger trout, as they darted through the sliding glow beneath his perch.

But suddenly, straight and swift as a diving cormorant, he shot down into the torrent and disappeared beneath the surface. A watcher directly overhead, escaping the baffling reflections, might have seen him swimming, head outstretched, mastering the tremendous rush of the stream with mighty strokes, fairly outspeeding the fish in their own element. Near the limit of the clear water he overtook and seized the quarry which he had marked—a trout not far from seven inches in length. The saw-toothed edges of his beak gripped it securely, and he rose with it to the surface just where the chute was breaking into a smother of trampled foam.

With a furious flapping of wings, he lifted himself almost clear of the flood, and beat along the tossed surface, dragging tail and feet for perhaps a dozen yards before he could get into full flight. Once fairly a-wing, however, he wheeled and made back hurriedly for his perch. Here he proceeded to swallow



"It was a long, difficult, choking process."

The Secret Trails]

his prize head first. It was a long, difficult, choking process, for the fish was one of the stoutest he had ever attempted. But a little choking was of small consequence in view of his heroic appetite, and, after many an undignified paroxysm, he accomplished the task. It might have seemed that a trout of this size was a fairly substantial meal. But such was his keenness that, even while the wide flukes of his engorged victim were still sticking out at the corners of his beak, his fierce red eyes were once more peering downwards into the torrent in search of fresh prey.

Just about this time, in the clear blue overhead, a green-winged teal was beating his way above the tree-tops, making for the stream with the fear of death at his heart. A mighty flier, his short muscular wings drove him through the air at a speed not much less than ninety or a hundred miles an hour. But behind him, overtaking him inexorably, came the shape that stood for doom itself in the eyes of all his tribe—the dreadful blue falcon, or duck-hawk. The teal knew that his only chance of escape from this long-winged pursuer was to reach the water, plunge beneath it, and swim for

some hiding-place under the fringing weeds.

The teal's wings, throbbing with a swift, short vibration, whistled shrilly in the still air, so that a prowling wild-cat by the water-side heard the sound even above the dull roar of the rapids, and glared upward alertly. The long wings of the hawk, bent sharply at the elbows, worked more slowly, but with a nervous terrific thrust which urged him through the air like a projectile. For all its appalling speed, the sound of his flight was nothing more than a strong pulsating hiss.

Close ahead of him now the teal saw refuge—the flashing line of the rapids. But the hawk was already close upon him. In despair he hurled himself downwards too soon. The pursuer also shot downwards and struck. But the lofty top of a water-ash, just missed by the short wings of the fugitive, forced the long pinion of the hawk to swerve a little, so that he partly missed his stroke. Instead of clutching the victim's neck and holding it securely, he dealt merely a glancing blow upon the back behind the wings. It was enough, however, and the unhappy teal was hurled earthward, flapping through the tips of the

branches. The great hawk followed hurriedly, to retrieve his prey from the ground.

As it chanced however, the victim came down with a thud almost beneath the whiskered nose of the wild-cat. A pounce, and the great cat had her paw upon it, and crouched snarling up at the hawk. In a fury the hawk swooped and struck downwards. But wisdom came to him just in time, and he did not strike home. His swoop became a demonstration merely, an expression of his rage at having his prey thus snatched from his beak. With one short, shrill cry of anger, he swerved off and sailed upwards over the river. The cat growled softly, picked up the prize in her jaws and trotted into the bushes to devour it.

The spot where all this happened was perhaps a hundred yards below that dead tree upon whose out-thrust naked branch the splendid merganser drake was making his meal. In fact, he had just finished it—the last of the trout's tail had just vanished with a spasm down his strained gullet—when the baffled hawk caught sight of him and swooped. Happily for him, he on his part caught sight of the hawk, and dropped like lead into the

torrent. The hawk alighted on the dead branch, and sat upright motionless, as if surprised. The change was so sudden that it almost seemed as if the duck had been metamorphosed into a hawk on the instant by the stroke of an invisible enchanter's wand.

The fisher of the chutes, meanwhile, was swimming straight down stream for the broken water. Like his unfortunate little cousin, the teal, he, too, had felt the fear of death smitten into his heart, and was heading desperately for the refuge of some dark overhanging bank, deep-fringed with weeds, where the dreadful eye of the hawk should not discern him.

The hawk sat upon the branch and watched his quarry swimming beneath the surface. At last the swimmer came to the broken water and plunged into it. Almost instantly he was forced to the top. With only head and wings above the mad smother, he flapped onward frantically, beating down the foam about him. Straightway the hawk glided from his perch and darted after him.

The drake sank again instantly. But at this point in the rapids it was impossible for him to stay down. As long as his body was

completely submerged, it was at the mercy of the twisting and tortured currents, which rolled him over and over, in spite of his swimming craft. He would have been drowned, the breath battered clean out of him, in half a minute more, had he maintained the hopelessly unequal struggle. Once more he half emerged, filled his gasping lungs, and pounded onward desperately, half flying and half swimming. It was a mongrel method of progression, in which he was singularly expert.

Immediately over his outstretched gleaming head flew the hawk. But this frequenter of the heights of air, for all his savage valour, was troubled at the leaping waves and the tossing foam of these mad rapids. He did not understand them. They seemed to jump up at him, and he dare not let his sweeping wing-tips touch them, lest they should seize and drag him down. As he flew, his down-reaching, clutching talons were not half a yard above the fugitive's head. Where the waves for an instant sank, they came closer, but not quite within grasping reach. The marauder from the upper air was waiting till his quarry should reach less turbulent waters.

A few yards further on, the torrent fell seething over a long ledge into a pool of brief quiet. Immediately beyond the lip of the ledge the hawk lifted his wings high over his back and struck downward, so that his talons went deep into the water. But water was all they clutched. The wily drake had plunged with the plunge of the fall itself, and was now darting onward at a safe depth. The hawk followed, his wing-tips now almost brushing the water.

The pool was, perhaps, a hundred yards in length. Then the combined flow of the North Fork and the Ottanoonsis broke once more into turbulence, and once more the desperate swimmer was forced to the surface. But, as before, the leaping waves of the rapids were too much for his pursuer, and he was able to flap his way onward in a cloud of foam, while doom hung low above his head, yet hesitated to strike.

The odds, however, were now laid heavily against the fugitive. The hawk, embittered by the loss of his first quarry, had become as dogged in pursuit as a weasel, not to be shaken off or evaded or deceived. The rapids would presently come to an end.

Then, in the still water, unless he should chance upon a hiding-place, the drake would soon be forced to come to the top for breath, and those throttling talons would instantly close upon his neck. But the antic forest Fates, wearied of the simple routine of the wilderness, had decreed an altogether novel intervention, and were giggling in their cloaks of ancient moss.

Beside the pool at the foot of the rapids stood a fisherman, casting for trout amid the whirling foam-clusters. He had three flies on his cast, and, because in these waters there was always the chance of hooking a grilse, he was using heavy tackle. His flies, as befitted these amber-brown, tumultuous northern streams, were large and conspicuous—a *Parmachenie Belle* for the tail fly, with a *Montreal* and a *Red Hackle* for the drops.

Far across the pool, where an eddy sucked sullenly at the froth-patches as they swung by, the fisherman had just had a heavy rise. He had struck too quickly, deceived by the swirl of the current, and missed his fish. He had a lot of line out, and the place was none too free for a long cast; but he was

impatient to drop his flies again on the spot where the big fish was feeding.

Just as he made his cast, he saw the fleeing drake and the pursuing hawk come round the bend. He saw the frantic fugitive dive over the ledge and disappear. He saw the great hawk swoop savagely. He tried to check his cast, but it was too late. A remark unsuitable to the printed page exploded upon his lips, and he saw his leader settle deliberately over the long, beating wings, the tail-fly coiling about them like a whip-lash.

The last drop-fly, as luck would have it, caught just in the corner of the hawk's angrily open beak, hooking itself firmly. At the sudden sharp sting of it, the great bird turned his head and noticed, for the first time, the fisherman standing on the bank. At the same moment he felt the light restraint of the almost invisible leader upon his wings, where the other two flies had affixed themselves. He shot up into the air, and heard a sharp, disconcerting rattle as the taut line raced from the reel. The drag upon his beak and the light check upon his wings were inexplicable to him, and appalling. Drake, teal, hunger, and wrath were all alike forgotten,

and he beat upwards with a rush that made the reel fairly screech its indignant protest. For a moment the fisherman, bewildered, tried to play him like a salmon. Then the leader parted from the line. The fisherman reeled in the limp coils, and the worried hawk flew off with the flies.

The drake, unrealizing that the dreadful chase was done, sped onward beneath the surface till he could go without breath no longer. Then he came up among some arrow-weeds, lifted his head beneath the shelter of one of the broad-barbed leaves, and floated there quivering. For a good ten minutes he waited, moveless, with the patience of the wild things. Then his terror faded, appetite once more began to invite his attention, and he took note of a minnow flickering slowly over the sun-flecked mud below him. He dived and caught it, came to the surface and swallowed it. Much refreshed, he looked about him. There was no such thing as a hawk in sight. Some way up the shore there was a man at the water's edge, fishing. The drake was suspicious of men, though he did not greatly fear them, as he and his rank-fleshed tribe were not interesting to the

hunters. He rose noisily into the air, made a detour over the tree-tops to avoid the fisherman, and flew back to his dead branch overhanging the amber rush of the chutes.

The Aigrette

THE Girl, sitting before her dressing-table, looked at the fair reflection in her great mirror and smiled happily. Those searching lights at either side of the mirror could find no flaw in the tender colouring of her face, in the luminous whiteness of neck and arm and bosom. Her wide-set eyes, like the red bow of her mouth, were kind and gay. The brightness of her high-coiffed hair was surmounted by a tuft of straight egret plumes, as firm, pearl-white, and delicate as a filigree of frost.

The Girl had never looked so lovely. Never before had she worn anything that so became her as that ethereal plume. She knew it ; and the glances of her maid, straying from her business with filmy garments and dainty adornments, told her so. She threw a wisp of silken gossamer over her arm

and tripped eagerly down to the drawing-room.

The Man came forward to meet her, his eyes paying without stint the tribute she was craving of him.

"There will be no one there to compare with you!" he said softly. "There is no one anywhere to compare with you."

"It is becoming, isn't it?" she answered, glowing at his praise, and nodding her bright head to indicate the ethereal white plume.

"It is indeed," he asserted heartily. "But nothing could heighten your beauty. You did not need it, and I'm rather afraid the bird did." He kissed her finger-tips as he spoke, lest she should think he was being critical.

The Girl pouted a little, being very tender-hearted, and loth to be reminded of unpleasant things.

"I know what you mean," said she quickly, withdrawing her hand in displeasure. "But the poor bird is dead, anyway; and if I didn't buy the thing, some other woman would. And it's horrid of you to speak of it now!"

The Man laughed.

"It can't make you more beautiful, but if it makes you happier, that's quite enough for me," said he. "I'm afraid that a very little pleasure for you is of more consequence in my eyes than a thousand million birds."

And upon this assurance the Girl forgave him.

* * * * *

The wide lagoon lay windless, shining like milky-blue glass under the blaze of the southern sky. It was shallow, its surface broken here and there with patches of tall gold-green reeds. Its shores seemed half afloat, fringed as they were with gnarled, squat bushes growing directly out of the water. This irregular bushy growth, with the green-shadowed water beneath its branches, stretched back for several hundred yards from the open lagoon to a dense wall of jungle, a banked mass of violently green leafage starred with cream-white and crimson bloom.

Not cream-white, but of a coldly pure silver-white, like new snow, some two or three score long-necked, long-legged birds flapped angularly between the milky blue of the water and the intense, vibrant blue of

the sky, or stood half-leg deep in the shallows, motionless, watching for their prey. They looked like bits of a Japanese screen brought to life and sown broadcast in this sun-steeped southern wilderness. High overhead, a black speck against the azure, a hawk wheeled slowly in vast spirals, staring down desirously upon the peaceful lagoon. That peace he durst not invade, for he knew and feared the lightning strokes of the long dagger-like beaks of the white egrets.

In the top of one of the gnarled bushes at the edge of the open, right over the water, was built a spacious but rickety-looking nest of dead sticks. It was the most un-nestlike of nests, a mere crazy platform, with no apparent qualifications as a home except the most perfect ventilation. One might reasonably suppose that the first requirement in the nest of a bird should be that it would hold eggs securely. But this unsightly collection of sticks looked as if that was the last thing it could be depended on to do. It was so loose and open that the eggs ought to fall through into the water. It was so flat that any eggs which dodged falling through should surely, according to all known

laws of Nature, be blown off by the first vigorous gust. Nevertheless, it was clear that the rude structure had held eggs, and proved not unworthy of its trust, for it was now occupied by four young egrets.

They were grotesque and solemn babies, these nestlings, sitting up quite motionless on their leg-joints and half-feathered rumps, with their long legs thrust straight out before them over the sticks, their long beaks resting contemplatively on their nearly naked breasts, their round, bright, unwinking eyes staring out blankly upon their little world of gold and blue. Scattered here and there over the sweep of fringing bushes were a dozen or so more of these rickety platforms of sticks, each with its solemn group of stilt-legged staring young, motionless as statues, interested in nothing upon earth save the quantity of fish or frogs which their untiring parents could supply to their unassuageable appetites.

Above this outermost nest, with the four fledglings in it, hung for a moment, hovering on wide wings, the great white mother egret, with a shining orange fish in her beak. She dropped her long legs, as if feeling for a

foothold, and alighted on the edge of the crazy platform so softly that not a stick protested. At her coming four long beaks were lifted into the air, gaping hungrily and squawking with eagerness. All four seemed equally ravenous. But the mother-bird knew well enough which she had fed last, and which was most in need. She jammed the prize, with what seemed scant ceremony, into the beak whose turn it was to get it. The fish was thicker than the youngster's long thin neck, but it was promptly swallowed head first. It went down slowly, with a succession of spasms which looked agonizing, but were, in fact, ecstatic.

Before flying off again to resume her quest of fish, the mother egret remained for a few moments on the edge of the nest, to rest and preen herself. Her snow-pure plumage shone in the sunlight like spun silver. Her neck feathers were prolonged in fine drooping lines far down over her breast. From the centre of her back, between the shoulders, grew a bunch of long, exquisitely delicate plumes, as white and apparently as fragile as the frost-flowers on a window. These were her festal adornment, worn, by herself and

her mate alike, only in the nesting season.

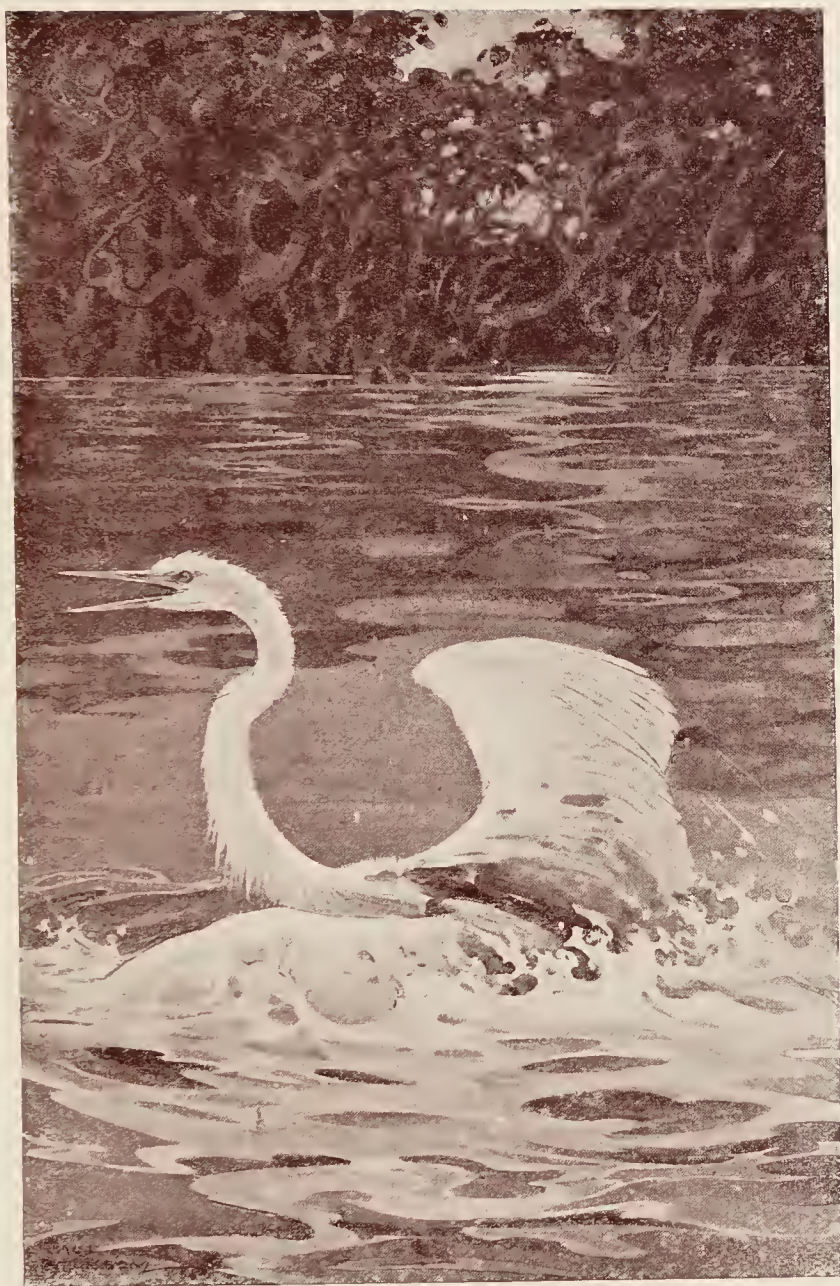
Having preened herself well, and shaken her long, snaky neck as if to take the kinks out of it, she spread her shining wings and lifted herself into the air. She rose, however, but a few inches, and then, flapping and squawking wildly, she was dragged down again by some unseen force. Her frantic struggles knocked off a corner of the nest, and swept off one of the awkward nestlings, which fell kicking and sprawling through the leafage and disappeared with a splash. A moment more and the mother, for all her wild fight against the unseen fate, was drawn down after him into the shadowed water. Then a little flat-bottomed boat, or ducking-punt, with a man crouching in the bottom of it, came worming its way through the narrow lane of water between the stems of the bushes. The man seized her by the dangerous beak, jerked her into the punt, put his knee upon her neck, detached the noose of a copper-wire snare from her leg, drew a keen hunting-knife, and deftly sliced the snowy plumes from the flesh of her back.

Then he hurled her out into the open

water, that she might not be in his way while he rearranged the snare upon the edge of the nest in order to catch her mate.

Half stunned, and altogether bewildered by her agony, the mother egret flapped blindly upon the top of the water, her snowy plumage crimsoned with her life-blood. After a few moments she succeeded in getting into the air. Flying heavily, and lurching as she went, she flew across the lagoon, blundered in among the bushes, and fell with her legs in the water, her twitching wings entangled in the branches. There, after a few vain struggles, she lay still, dying slowly—very slowly—her beak half open, but her eyes wide and undaunted.

Not long afterwards the male egret, who had been fishing far down the lagoon, and knew nothing of what had happened, came back to the nest with food. He, too, was caught in the fatal snare, dragged down, scalped of his nuptial plumes as the red savage of old scalped his enemies, and thrown away to die at his leisure. The law of that country forbade the shooting of the egrets in the nesting season, when alone they wore the plumes which women crave. The plume-



“ Flapped blindly upon the top of the water.”



hunter, therefore, felt that he was evading the law successfully if he hacked the prize from the living bird and released it while still alive and able to fly. If the bird died agonizingly afterwards, who was going to swear that he was the slayer?

Throughout the morning the like swift tragedy was enacted at one nest after the other. The deadly punt slid murderously, silently, up and down the hidden water-lanes among the bushes, and the man with the knife did his work noiselessly, save for the threshing and splashing of his victims.

In the course of an hour, however, for all the marauder's stealth, the whole herony was in a state of desperate fear. Half a dozen birds had been snared, and the others, flying high overhead and staring down with keen, terrified eyes, had detected the slaughterer in his hiding under the branches. They had seen him, too, resetting his snares upon the edges of the nests. And in spite of the fact that, after doing so, he withdrew to some distance among the bushes—as far as the cords attached to the snares would permit—they dreaded to approach their nests again. But there were their younglings, solemn and

hungry, quite uncomprehending of the doom which hung over them, hoarsely and trustingly petitioning to be fed. The parent birds could not long resist those appeals. Love and tenderness triumphed over fear, even over the clear view of mortal peril. One after another the great white birds came back, trembling but devoted, to their nests. One after another, sooner or later, got a foot into that implacable wire noose, was dragged down beneath the bushes, and thrown out weltering in its blood. There was no escaping a trap thus baited with the appeals of the young. And before the lagoon had taken the first of the sunset colour, there was not one adult egret in the whole herony which had not paid the bloody price of its devotion.

At last, when the lagoon lay like a sheet of burnished copper, the man with the punt came out boldly from among the bushes and paddled off toward the outlet with his bleeding trophies. As he vanished, three or four birds, stronger and more tenacious of life than their fellows, came flapping back to their nests, their backs and wings and thighs caked with blood. Swaying as they perched upon the stick platforms, they managed to

feed the nestlings once more. Then, dogged in their devotion, they flew off to continue their tasks. They never returned again, but fell in the shallows where they stood trying to fish : and if the Fates of the wilderness elected to be merciful, they were drowned quickly.

All night, through the star-strewn summer dark, the orphaned nestlings kept up their harshly plaintive cries of hunger and loneliness. A pair of owls, hearing these cries, and guessing that all could not be right with the egret colony, came winnowing up noiselessly and took toll of the defenceless nests. After daybreak, the wheeling hawk dropped low to investigate, then struck wherever he found the nestlings fattest and most tempting. Toward noon, under the pitiless downpour of the unclouded sun, the little ones wilted like cut grass, thirst and hunger stilling their pitiful complaints. Long before night there was not a nestling left alive on the whole lagoon.

* * * * *

The Girl, with snowy aigrette in her bright hair, her gloved fingers resting on the Man's arm, stood upon the kerb outside the theatre,

waiting for a taxi. A light dogcart came by. The horse, sleek and spirited and spoilt, was in wayward humour, and took it into its head to give its driver trouble. The driver tried to soothe it, but it would not be soothed. It began backing capriciously. The driver cut it smartly with his light whip.

"Oh," cried the Girl, "see how he's beating that poor horse! What a brute!"

"It's hurting the horse about as much," said the Man, "as if you struck it with your fan! Moreover, the horse is behaving very badly, and must be made to mind. It's endangering the whole traffic."

The Girl flushed, bit her lip, and withdrew her hand from the Man's arm. Just then the summoned taxi drew up at the kerb. The Girl stepped in.

"What brutes men are!" she said. "Perhaps they can't help being cruel! They have no intuition, so how can they understand?"

The Man glanced at the aigrette, smiled discreetly, and said nothing.

Brannigan's Mary

BRANNIGAN was wanting fresh meat, red meat. Both he and his partner, Long Jackson, were sick to death of trout, stewed apples, and tea. Even fat bacon, that faithful stand-by, was beginning to lose its charm, and to sizzle at them with an unsympathetic note when the trout were frying in it. And when a backwoodsman gets at odds with his bacon, then something has got to be done.

Going noiselessly as a cat in his cowhide larrigans, Brannigan made his way down the narrow trail between the stiff dark ranks of the spruce timber toward the lake. As the trail dipped to the shore, he caught a sound of splashing, and stopped abruptly, motionless as a stump, to listen. His trained ears interpreted the sound at once.

"Moose pullin' up water-lily roots!" he muttered to himself with satisfaction. Edging in among the trunks beside the trail, to be the better hidden, he crept forward with redoubled caution.

A few moments more and a sparkle of sunlight flashed into his eyes, and through the screening spruce branches he caught sight of the quiet water. There, straight before him, was a dark young moose cow, with a two-months calf at her side, wading ashore through the shadows.

Brannigan raised his rifle and waited till the pair should come within easier range. Cartridges are precious when one lives a five days' tramp from the nearest settlement, and he was not going to risk the wasting of a single shot. The game was coming his way, and it was the pot, not sport, that he was considering.

Now, no one knew better than Brannigan that it was against the law of New Brunswick to shoot a moose at this season, or a cow moose at any season. He knew, also, that to shoot a cow moose was not only illegal, but apt to be extremely expensive. For New Brunswick enforces her game laws with a brusque and

uncompromising rigour ; and she values a cow moose at something like a hundred pounds. Brannigan had no stomach for a steak at such a price. But he had every reason to believe that at this moment there was not a game-warden within at least a hundred miles of this unimportant and lonely lake at the head of the Ottanoonsis. He was prepared to gamble on this supposition. Without any serious misgivings, he drew a bead on the ungainly animal, as she emerged with streaming flanks from the water and strode up toward the thickets which fringed the white beach. But the calf by her side kept getting in the way, and Brannigan's finger lingered on the trigger, awaiting a clearer shot.

Suddenly a dense thicket, half a dozen yards or so distant from the leisurely cow, burst open as with an explosion, and a towering black form shot out from the heart of it. It seemed to overhang the cow for a fraction of a second, and then fell forward as if to crush her to the earth. Brannigan lowered his gun, a look of humorous satisfaction flitting over his craggy features.

"Thank you kindly, Mr. B'ar," he mut-

tered. " 'Ther' ain't no game-warden on 'arth as kin blame me fer that ! "

But the matter was not yet as near conclusion as he imagined. The cow, apparently so heedless, had been wideawake enough, and had caught sight of her assailant from the tail of her eye, just in time to avoid the full force of the attack. She leapt aside, and the blow of those armed paws, instead of breaking her back, merely ripped a long scarlet furrow down her flank.

At the same instant she wheeled and struck out savagely with one razor-edged fore-hoof. The stroke caught the bear glancingly on the shoulder, laying it open to the bone.

Had the bear been a young one, the battle thus inauspiciously begun might have gone against him, and those lightning hoofs, with their far-reaching stroke, might have driven him in blood and ignominy to refuge in a tree. But this bear was old and of ripe experience. As if daunted by the terrific buffet, he drew back upon his haunches, seeming to shrink to half its size.

The outraged cow came on again, furious and triumphant, thinking to end the matter with a rush. The bear, a wily boxer, parried

her next stroke with a blow that broke her leg at the hock. Then his long body shot out again and upward to its full height, and crashed down upon her neck with a neat twist that snapped the vertebræ like chalk. She collapsed like a sack of shavings, her long dark muzzle, with red tongue protruding, turned upward and backward, as if she stared in horror at her doom.

The bear set his teeth into her throat with a windy grunt of satisfaction.

At that moment Brannigan fired. The heavy soft-nosed bullet crashed home. The bear lifted himself straight up on his hind legs, convulsively pawing at the air, then dropped on all-fours, ran round in a circle with his head bent inwards, and fell over on his side. The calf, which had stood watching the fight in petrified amazement, had recovered the use of its legs with a bound at the shock of the report, and shambled off into the woods with a hoarse bleat of terror.

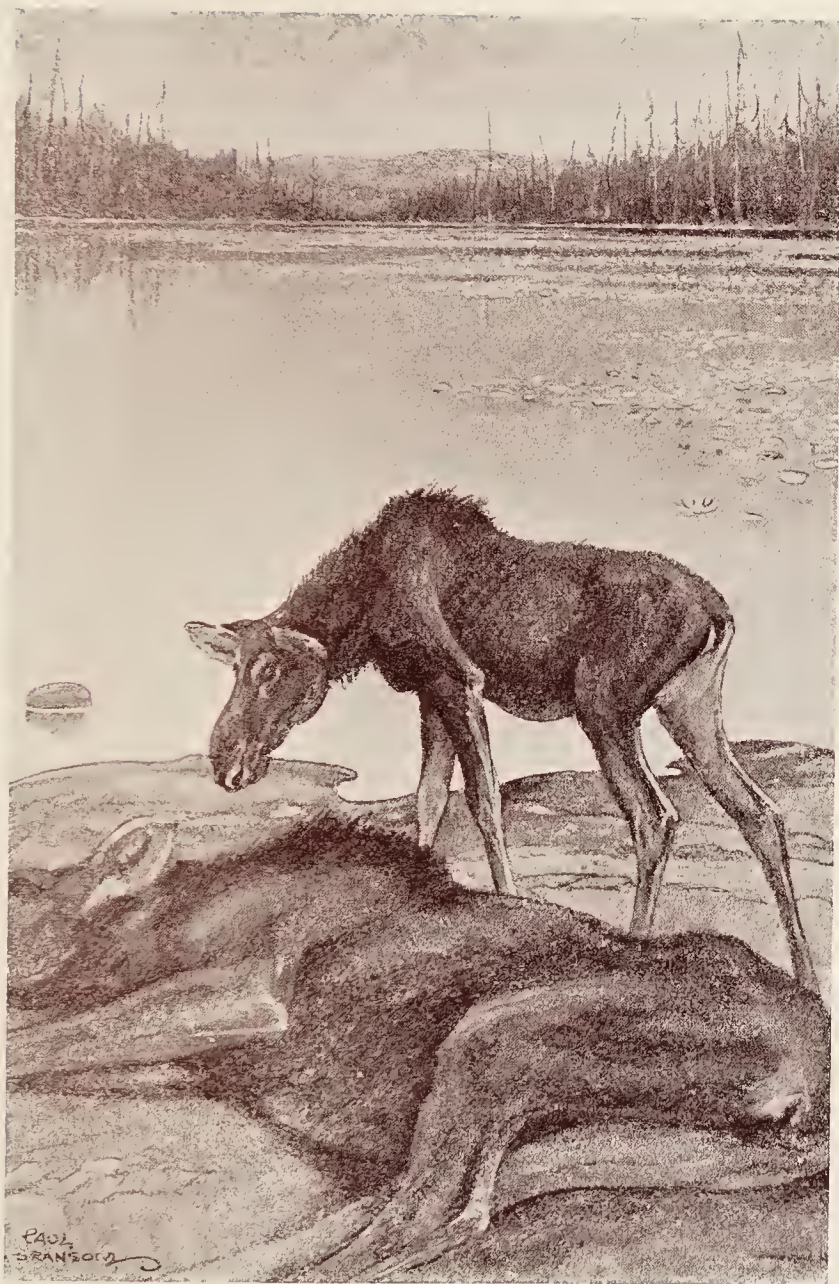
Hugely satisfied with himself, Brannigan strode forth from his hiding and examined his double prize. The bear, being an old one, he had no use for it as food, now that

he was assured of a supply of choice moose-venison, for he knew by experience the coarseness and rankness of bear-meat, except when taken young.

Touching up the edge of his hunting-knife on the sole of his larrigan, he skinned the bear deftly, rolled up the heavy pelt and tied it with osier-withes for convenience in the lugging. Then, after a wash in the lake, he turned back to fetch his partner and the drag, that they might haul the dead moose to the camp and cut it up conveniently at home. Glancing back as he vanished up the trail, he saw the orphaned calf stick its head out from behind a bush and stare after him pathetically

“Mebbe I’d oughter shoot the little beggar, too,” he mused, “or the bears’ll jest get it!” But being rather tender-hearted where all young things were concerned, he decided that it might be big enough to look after itself, and so should have its chance.

A half-hour later, when Brannigan and his partner, hauling the drag behind them briskly, got back to the lake, they found the calf standing with drooped head beside the body of its mother. At their approach it backed off a dozen yards or so to the edge of the



“ Standing with drooped head beside the body of its mother.”

The Secret Trails]

bushes, and stood gazing at them with soft, anxious eyes.

"Best knock the calf on the head, too, while we're about it," said Long Jackson practically. "It looks fat an' juicy."

But Brannigan, his own first impulse in regard to the poor youngster now quite forgotten, protested with fervour.

"Fool!" he grunted good-naturedly. "Ain't yer got enough fresh meat in this 'ere cow I've foraged fer ye? I've kinder promised that there unfortunate orphant she shouldn't be bothered none."

"She's too young yet to fend fer herself. The b'ars'll git her, if we don't," argued Long Jackson.

But Brannigan's sympathies, warm if illogical, had begun to assert themselves with emphasis.

"This 'ere's *my* shindy, Long," he answered doggedly, "an' I say the poor little critter 'd oughter have her chance. She *may* pull through. An' good luck to her, ses I! We got all the fresh meat we want."

"Oh, if ye're feeling *that* way about the orphant, Tom, I ain't kickin' none," answered Jackson, spitting accurate tobacco juice upon

a small white boulder some ten or twelve feet distant. "I was only thinkin' we'd save the youngster a heap of trouble if we'd jest help her go the way of her ma right now."

"You ax her fer *her* opinion on that p'int!" grunted Brannigan, tugging the carcass of the moose on to the drag.

Long Jackson turned gravely to the calf.

"Do ye want to be left to the b'ars in the big black woods, all by yer lonesome?" he demanded.

The calf, thus pointedly addressed, backed farther into the bush and stared in mournful bewilderment.

"Or would ye rather be et, good an' decent, an' save ye a heap o' frettin'?" continued Long Jackson persuasively.

A bar-winged moose-fly, that vicious biter, chancing to alight at that moment on the calf's ear, she shook her lank head vehemently.

"What did I tell ye?" demanded Brannigan dryly. "She knows what she wants!"

"Kinder guess that settles it," agreed Long Jackson with a grin, spitting once more on

the inviting white boulder. Then the two men set the rope traces of the drag over the homespun of their shoulders, and, grunting at the first tug, started up the trail with their load.

The calf took several steps forward from the thicket and stared in distraction after them. She could not understand this strange departure of her mother. She bleated several times hoarsely, appealingly, but all to no effect. Then just as the drag, with its dark, pathetic burden, was disappearing around a turn of the trail, she started after it, and quickly overtook it with her ungainly, shambling run. All the way to the cabin she followed closely, nosing from time to time at the unresponsive figure on the drag.

Brannigan, glancing back over his shoulder from time to time, concluded that the calf was hungry. Unconsciously he had come to accept the responsibility for its orphaned helplessness, though he might easily have put all the blame upon the bear. But Brannigan was no shirker. He would have scorned any such sophistry. He was worrying now over the question of what he could give the inconveniently confiding little animal

to eat. He decided at length upon a thin lukewarm gruel of corn-meal, slightly salted, and trusted that the sturdiness of the moose stomach might survive such a violent change of diet. His shaggy eyebrows knitted themselves over the problem till Long Jackson, trudging at his side, demanded to know if he'd "got the belly-ache."

This being just the affliction which he was dreading for the calf, Brannigan felt a pang of guilt and vouchsafed no reply.

Arriving at the cabin, Jackson got out his knife, and was for setting to work at once on the skinning and cutting up. But Brannigan intervened with prompt decision.

"Don't ye be so brash, Long," said he. "This 'ere's *Mary*. Hain't yer got no consideration for *Mary's* feelings? She's comin' to stop with us; an' it wouldn't be decent to go cuttin' up her ma right afore her eyes. Ye wait till I git her tied up 'round behind the camp. Then I'll go an' fix her some corn-meal gruel, seein's we haven't got no proper milk for her." And he proceeded to unhitch the rope from the drag.

Jackson heaved a sigh of resignation, seated himself on the body of the slain cow,

and fished up his stumpy black clay pipe from the depths of his breeches pocket.

"So ye're goin' to be Mary's ma, eh?" he drawled, with amiable sarcasm. "If ye'd jest shave that long Irish lip o' yourn, Tom, she'd take ye fer one o' her family right enough."

He ducked his head and hoisted an elbow to ward off the expected retort; but Brannigan was too busy just then for any fooling. Having rubbed his hands and sleeves across the hide of the dead mother, he was gently approaching the calf, with soft words of caress and reassurance. It is improbable that the calf had any clear apprehension of the English tongue, or even of Brannigan's backwoods variant of it. But she seemed to feel that his tones, at least, were not hostile. She slightly backed away, shrinking and snorting, but at length allowed Brannigan's outstretched fingers to approach her dewy muzzle. The smell of her mother on those fingers reassured her mightily. Being very hungry, she seized them in her mouth and fell to sucking them as hard as she could.

"Pore little eejut," said Brannigan, much moved by this mark of confidence, "ye shall

have some gruel quick as I kin make it." With two fingers between her greedy lips and a firm hand on the back of her neck, he had no difficulty in leading her around behind the cabin, where he tied her up securely, out of sight of the work of Long Jackson's industrious knife.

* * * * *

On Brannigan's gruel Mary made shift to survive, and even to grow, and soon she was able to discard it in favour of her natural forage of leaves and twigs. From the first she took Brannigan *in loco parentis*, and, except when tied up, was ever dutifully at his heels. But she had a friendly spirit toward all the world, and met Long Jackson's advances graciously. By the end of autumn she was amazingly long-legged and lank and awkward, with an unmatched talent for getting in the way and knocking things over. But she was on a secure footing as member of the household, petted extravagantly by Brannigan and cordially accepted by Long Jackson as an all-round good partner. As Jackson was wont to say, she was not beautiful, but she had a great head when it came to choosing her friends.

As would naturally be supposed, Mary, being a member of the firm, had the free run of the cabin, and spent much of her time therein, especially at meals or in bad weather. But she was not allowed to sleep indoors, because Brannigan was convinced that such a practice would not be good for her health. At the same time she could not be left outdoors at night, the night air of the wilderness being sometimes infected with bears, lynxes, and wild-cats. A strong pen, therefore, was built for her against the end wall of the cabin, very open and airy, but roofed against the rain and impervious to predatory claws. In this pen she was safe, but not always quite happy ; for sometimes in the still dark of the night, when Brannigan and Long Jackson were snoring in their hot bunks within the cabin, she would see an obscure black shape prowling stealthily around the pen, and hungry eyes would glare in upon her through the bars. Then she would bawl frantically in her terror. Brannigan would tumble from his bunk and rush out to the rescue, and the dread black shadow would fade away into the gloom.

When winter settled down upon the wilder-

ness, it did so with a rigour intended to make up for several mild seasons.

The snow came down, and drove and drifted till Mary's pen was buried so deep that a tunnel had to be dug to her doorway. Then set in the long, steady, dry cold, tonic and sparkling, but so intense that the great trees would crack under it with reports like pistol-shots upon the death-like stillness of the night. But all was warmth and plenty at the snow-draped cabin ; and Mary, though she had no means of knowing it, was without doubt the most comfortable and contented young moose in all Eastern Canada. She was sometimes a bit lonely, to be sure, when Brannigan and Jackson were away on their snow-shoes, tending their wide circuit of traps, and she was shut up in her pen. At such times doubtless, her inherited instincts hankered after the companionship of the trodden mazes of the " moose yard." But when her partners were at home, and she was admitted to the cabin with them, such faint stirrings of ancestral memory were clean forgotten. There was no companionship for Mary like that of Brannigan and Long Jackson, who knew so consummately how to scratch her long, wagging ears.

But Fate, the hag, growing jealous, no doubt, of Mary's popularity, now turned without so much as a snarl of warning and clawed the happy little household to the bone. In some inexplicable, underhanded way she managed to set fire to the cabin in the night, when Brannigan and Jackson were snoring heavily. They slept, of course, well clad. They awoke choking, from a nightmare. With unprintable remarks, they leapt from their bunks into a scorching smother of smoke, snatched up instinctively their thick coats and well-greased larrigans, fumbled frantically for the latch, and burst out into the icy, blessed air. Mary was bawling with terror, and bouncing about in her pen as if all the furies were after her.

Brannigan snatched her door open, and she lumbered out with a rush, knocking him into the snow, and went floundering off towards the woods. But in a couple of minutes she was back again and stood trembling behind Long Jackson.

At first both woodsmen had toiled like demons, dashing the snow in armfuls upon the blazing camp; but the fire, now well established, seemed actually to regard the

fluffy snow as so much more congenial fuel. Knowing themselves beaten, they drew back with scorched faces and smarting eyes, and stood watching disconsolately the ruin of their home. Mary thrust her long-muzzled head around from behind her partners, and wagged her ears, and stared.

In the face of real catastrophe the New Brunswick backwoodsman does not rave and tear his hair. He sets his teeth and he does a good deal of thinking. Presently Brannigan spoke.

"I noticed ye come away in a hurry, Long," he remarked dryly. "Did ye think to bring anything to eat with ye?"

"Nary bite!" responded Jackson. "I've brung along me belt—it was kind of tangled up wi' the coat—an' me knife's in it, all right." He felt in the pockets of his coat, "Here's baccy, an' me pipe, an' a bit o' string, an' a crooked nail! Wish't I'd know'd enough to eat a bigger supper last night! I hadn't no sort of an appetite."

"I've got me old *dudheen*," said Brannigan, holding up his stubby black clay. "An' I've got two matches, *jest two*, mind yer! An' that's all I *hev* got."

They filled their pipes thoughtfully and lit them frugally with a blazing splinter from the wood pile.

"Which is nearest," queried Jackson, "Conroy's Upper Camp, or Gillespie's, over to Red Brook?"

"Conroy's, sure," said Brannigan.

"How fur, would ye say?" insisted Jackson, who really knew quite as much about it as his partner.

"In four foot o' soft snow, an' no snow-shoes, about ten thousan' mile!" replied Brannigan consolingly.

"Then we'd better git a move on," said Jackson.

"I'm *thinkin'* we ain't got no time to waste starin' at bonfires," agreed Brannigan.

They turned their backs resolutely and headed off through the night and the snow toward Conroy's Camp, many frozen leagues to the south-eastward. Mary, bewildered and daunted, followed close at Brannigan's heels. And they left their blazing home to roar and fume and vomit sparks and flare itself out in the unheeding solitude.

Accustomed as they were to moving everywhere on snow-shoes in the winter, the two

woodsmen found it infinitely laborious and exhausting to flounder their way through a four-foot depth of light snow. They took half-mile turns, as near as they could guess, at going ahead to break the way.

Once they thought of putting this job upon Mary. But it was not a success. Mary didn't want to go ahead. Only with assiduous propulsion could they induce her to lead ; and then her idea of the direction of Conroy's Camp seemed quite unformed. Sometimes she would insist upon being propelled sideways. So they soon gave up the plan, and let her take her place in the rear which her humility seemed to demand.

Both men were in good condition, powerful and enduring. But in that savage cold their toil ate up their vitality with amazing speed. With plenty of food to supply the drain, they might have fought on almost indefinitely, defying frost and fatigue in the soundness of their physique. But the very efficiency of their bodily machinery made the demand for fuel come all the sooner. They smoked incessantly to fool their craving stomachs, till their pipes chanced to go out at the same time. Much too provident to use one of

their two matches, which might, later on, mean life or death to them, they chewed tobacco till their emptiness revolted at it.

Then, envious of Mary, who browsed with satisfaction on such twigs and saplings as came in her way, they cut young fir branches, peeled them, scraped the white inner bark, and chewed mouthfuls of the shavings. But it was too early for the sap to be working up, and the stuff was no more eatable than sawdust. They speedily dropped this unprofitable foraging, pulled their belts tighter, and pushed on with the calm stoicism of their breed.

Long Jackson was first to call for a halt. The pallid midwinter dawn was spreading up a sky of icy opal when he stopped and muttered abruptly—

“If we can’t eat, we must rest a spell.”

Brannigan was for pushing on, but a glance at Jackson’s face persuaded him.

“Give us one o’ them two matches o’ yours, Long,” said he. “If we don’t hev’ a fire, we’ll freeze, with nothin’ in our stomachs.”

“Nary match yet,” said Jackson doggedly. “We’ll need ’em worse later on.”

"Then we'll have to warm ourselves huggin' Mary," laughed Brannigan. It was a sound proposition. They scooped and burrowed a deep pit, made Mary lie down, and snuggled close against her warm flanks, embracing her firmly. Mary had been for some time hankering after a chance to rest her long legs and chew her cud, so she was in no way loth. With head uplifted above her reclining partners, she lay there very contentedly, ears alert and eyes half closed. The only sound on the intense stillness was the slow grind of her ruminating jaws and the deep breathing of the two exhausted men.

Both men slept. But, though Mary's vital warmth was abounding and inexhaustible, the still ferocity of the cold made it perilous for them to sleep long. In a half-hour Brannigan's vigilant subconsciousness woke him up with a start. He roused Jackson with some difficulty. They shook themselves and started on again, considerably refreshed, but ravenously hungry.

"Whatever would we have done without Mary?" commented Brannigan.

"Aye, aye!" agreed Jackson.

All the interminable day they pushed on stoically through the soft, implacable snow-depths, but stopping ever more and more frequently to rest, as the cold and the toil together devoured their forces.

At night they decided that one of the precious matches must be used. They *must* have a real fire and a real sleep, if they were to have any chance of winning through to Conroy's Camp. They made their preparations with meticulous care, taking no risk. After the deep trench was dug, they made a sound foundation for their fire at one end of it. They gathered birch bark and withered pine shavings and kindlings of dead wood, and gathered a store of branches, cursing grimly over their lack of an axe. Then Jackson scratched one match cautiously. It lit; the dry bark curled, cracked, caught; the clear young flame climbed lithely through the shavings and twigs. Just then an owl, astonished, flew hurriedly through the branches far overhead. He stirred a branch heavily snow-laden. With a soft swish a tiny avalanche slid down, fell upon the fire and blotted it out. Indignantly the two men pounced upon it and cleared it off,

hoping to find a few sparks still surviving. But it was as dead as a last year's mullein stalk.

Comment was superfluous, discussion unnecessary. Fire that night they must have. They scooped a new trench, clear in the open. They used the last match, and they built a fire so generous that for a while they could hardly endure its company in the trench. Mary, indeed, could not endure it, so she stayed outside. They smoked and they talked a little, not of their chances of making Conroy's Camp, but of baked pork and beans, fried steak and onions, and enormous boiled puddings smothered in butter and brown sugar. Then they slept for some hours. When the fire died down, Mary came floundering in and lay down beside them, so they did not feel the growing cold as soon as they should.

When they woke, they were half frozen and savage with hunger. There were still red coals under the ashes, so they revived the fire, smoked, and got themselves thoroughly warm. Then, with belt deeply drawn in, they resumed their journey in dogged silence. According to the silent calculation

of each, the camp was still so far ahead that the odds were all against their gaining it. But they did not trouble to compare their calculations or their hopes. Toward evening Long Jackson began to go to pieces badly. He had a great frame and immense muscular power, but, being gaunt and stringy, he had no reserves of fat in his hard tissues to draw upon in such an emergency as this. In warm weather his endurance would have been, no doubt, equal to Brannigan's. Now the need of fuel for the inner fire was destroying him. The enforced rests became more and more frequent. At last he grunted—

“I'm the lame duck o' this here outfit, Tom. Ye'd better push on, bein' so much fresher'n me, an' git the boys from the camp to come back for me.”

Brannigan laughed derisively.

“An' find ye in cold storage, Long! Ye'd be no manner o' use to yer friends *that* way. Ye wouldn't be worth comin' back fer.” Jackson chuckled feebly and dropped the subject, knowing he was a fool to have raised it. He felt it was good of Brannigan not to have resented the suggestion as an insult.

“Reach me a bunch o' them birch twigs

o' Mary's," he said. Having chewed a few mouthfuls and spat them out, he got up out of the snow and plunged on with a burst of new determination.

"That's where Mary's got the bulge on us," remarked Brannigan. "Ef we could live on birch-browse, now, I'd be so proud I wouldn't call the King my uncle."

"If Mary wasn't our pard, now," said Jackson, "we'd be all right. I'm that hungry I'd eat her as she stands, hair an' all."

Responding to a certain yearning note in Jackson's voice, Mary rubbed her long muzzle against him affectionately and nibbled softly at his sleeve.

Brannigan flushed. He was angry because his partner had voiced a thought which he had been at pains to banish from his own consciousness.

"Ef it hadn't a' been fer Mary, we wouldn't be alive now," said he sternly. "She's kep' us from freezin'."

"Oh, ye needn't git crusty over what I've said, Tom," replied Jackson, rubbing the long brown ears tenderly. "Mary's jest as much my pardner as she is yourn, an' I ain't

no cannibal. We'll see this thing through with Mary on the square, you bet. *But*—ef 'twasn't *Mary*—that's all *I* say ! ”

“ Right ye are, Long,” said Brannigan, quite mollified. But later in the day, as he glanced at his partner's drawn, sallow-white face, Brannigan's heart misgave him. He loved the confiding Mary quite absurdly ; but, after all, as he reminded himself, she was only a little cow-moose, while Long Jackson was a Christian and his partner. His perspective straightened itself out.

At last, with a heavy heart, he returned to the subject.

“ Ye was right, Long,” said he. “ Ef we don't make Conroy's Camp purty soon, we'll hev to—well, it'll be up to Mary ! Poor Mary ! But, after all, she's only a little moose-cow. An' I'm sure she'd be proud, ef she could understand ! ”

But Jackson was indignant, as he went labouring on, leaning upon Mary's powerful shoulder.

“ Not much,” he snorted feebly. “ Ther' ain't goin' to be no killin' of Mary on my account, an' don't ye forgit it ! 'Twouldn't do good, fer I wouldn't tech a sliver of her,

not ef I was dyin'. An' it would jest be onpleasant fer Mary."

Brannigan drew a breath of relief, for this meant at least a postponement of the unhappy hour. "Jest as ye like, Long!" he grunted. But he clenched his teeth on the resolution that, the moment his partner should become too weak for effective protest, Mary should come promptly to the rescue. After all, whatever Mary's own opinion on the subject, it would be an end altogether worthy of her. He drove a whole rabble of whimsical fancies through his mind, as he laboured resolutely onward through the snow. But his mittened hand went out continuously to caress Mary's ears, pleading pardon for the treason which it planned.

The midwinter dark fell early, and fell with peculiar blackness on Jackson's half-fainting eyes. He was leaning now on Mary's shoulders with a heaviness which that young person began to find irksome. She grunted complainingly at times, and made good-natured attempts to shake him off. But she had been well trained, and Brannigan's voice from time to time kept her from revolt. Brannigan was now watching his partner

narrowly in the gloom, noting his movements and the droop of his head, since he could no longer make much of his face. He was beginning to feel, with a heavy heart, that the end of poor Mary's simple and blameless career was very close at hand.

He was busily hardening his heart with forced frivolities. He felt his long knife. He slipped his mittens into his pocket that his stroke might be sure, swift, and painless, but his fingers shook a little with strong distaste. Then his eyes, glancing ahead, caught a gleam of yellow light through the tree-trunks. He looked again, to assure himself, and calmly pulled on his mittens.

"Mary," said he, "you've lost the chance o' yer life. Ye ain't goin' to be no hero, after all!"

"What're ye gruntin' about, Tom?" demanded Jackson dully, aroused by the ring in his partner's voice.

"There's Conroy's Camp right ahead!" cried Brannigan. Then he fell to shouting and yelling for help. Jackson straightened himself, opened his eyes wide, saw the light, and the sudden increase of it as the camp door was flung open, heard answering shouts,

and collapsed sprawling on Mary's back. He had kept going for the last few hours on his naked nerve.

It was food Long Jackson wanted—food and sleep. And on the following day he was himself again. At dinner, beside the long plank table built down the middle of the camp, he and Brannigan devoured boiled beans and salt pork and stewed dried apples, gulped down tins of black tea, and jointly narrated their experience to the interested choppers and teamsters, while Mary, shut up in the stables, munched hay comfortably and wondered what had become of her partners. They were big-boned, big-hearted children, these men of the New Brunswick lumber camps, quick in quarrel, quick in sentiment, but cool and close-lipped in the face of emergency. The “ boss ” of the camp, however, was of a different type—a driving, hard-eyed Westerner, accustomed to the control of lumber gangs of mixed races, and his heart was as rough as his tongue. In a lull in the talk he said suddenly to the visitors—

“ We're about sick o' salt pork in this camp, mates, an' the fresh beef ain't been sent out from the Settlement yit. Goin's

been too heavy. That fat young moose critter o' yourn'll come in mighty handy jest now. What d'ye want fer her as she stands? "

Long Jackson set down his tin of tea with a bump and looked at the speaker curiously. But Brannigan thought it was a joke, and laughed.

"Cow moose comes high in New Brunswick, Mr. Clancy," said he pleasantly, "as ye must a' been here long enough to know."

"Oh, that's all right," answered the boss; "but there ain't a game-warden within a hundred miles o' this camp, an' I'd risk it if there was. What'll ye take? "

Brannigan saw that the proposal was a serious one, and his face stiffened.

"Where Mary's concerned," said he, speaking with slow precision, "I guess me an' my pardner here's all the game-wardens that's required. It's close season all year round fer Mary, an' she ain't fer sale at any price."

There was a moment's silence, broken only by a shuffle of tin plates on the table. Then Long Jackson said—

"An' that's a fact, Mr. Clancy."

The boss made a noise of impatience between his teeth. He was not used to being

opposed, but he could not instantly forget that these visitors were his guests.

"Well," said he, "there ain't no property right in a moose, anyhow!"

"*We* think ther' be," replied Brannigan, "an' we know that there little moose cow's our'n, an' *not* fer sale at no price, what-so-ever!"

The boss was beginning to get angry at this incomprehensible attitude of his guests.

"Ther' ain't *no* property rights, I tell ye, in any wild critter o' these here woods. This critter's in my stables, an' I could jest *take* her, seein' as my hands needs her, without no talk o' payin' fer the privilege. But you two boys has been burnt out an' in hard luck, so I'll give ye the price o' good beef fer the critter. Ye kin take it or leave it, but I'm going to kinder requisition the critter."

As he spoke, he rose from his seat as if to go and carry out his purpose on the instant. There had been already growls of protest from the men of the camp, who understood, as he could not, the sentiment of their guests; but he gave no heed to them. His seat was farthest from the door. But before he had taken two strides, Long Jackson was at the

door, and had snatched up a heavy steel-shod "peevey." Having not yet quite recovered, he was still a bit excitable for a woodsman.

"Damn you, Jim Clancy, none o' yer butcherin'!" he shouted. Clancy sprang forward with an oath, but right in his path rose Brannigan, quiet and cold.

"Ye'd better hold on, Mr. Clancy," said he, "an' think it over. It's that little moose critter what's jest seen us through, an' I guess we'll see her through, too, Jackson an' me!"

His tone and manner were civility itself, but his big lean fist was clenched till the knuckles went white.

Clancy paused. He was entirely fearless, whether it were in a fight or a log-jam. But he was no fool, and his vocation forced him to think quickly. He realized suddenly that in the temper of his visitors was a resolution which would baulk at nothing. It would do him no good to have killing in the camp, even if he were not himself the victim. All this he saw at one thought, in the fraction of a flash. He saw also that his men would be against him. He choked back his wrath and cast about for words to save his face. And here one of his choppers came tactfully to his aid.

"We ain't wantin' fresh meat so bad as all that, Mr. Clancy," he suggested, with a grin. "Guess we'd ruther wait fer the beef."

"Aye, aye!" chimed in several voices pacifically.

Clancy pulled himself together and spoke lightly. "I s'pose ye're right, lads, an' it was yer own feed I was thinking of. If ye're satisfied, I must be. An' I was wrong, o' course, to treat our visitors so rough, an' try force *any* kind o' a bargain on them. I ax their pardon."

Taking the pardon for granted, he went back to his seat.

Brannigan, who had never lost grip of himself for a moment, sat down again with a good-natured grin. A murmur of satisfaction went round the table, and knives once more clattered on tin plates.

Long Jackson, by the door, hesitated and glared piercingly at the boss, who refrained from noticing.

At length he set down his weapon and came back to the table. In a minute or two his appetite returned, and he could resume his meal.

Out in the barn, in the smell of hay and

horses, Mary lay tranquilly waving her ears, staring at her unfamiliar company and chewing her comfortable cud, untroubled with any intuitions of the fate which had twice within the last few hours so narrowly passed her by.

A Basket of Fish

FRESH and tender, the light of the mild spring afternoon caressed the little abandoned clearing in the wilderness. At the back of the clearing, beneath a solitary white birch tree just bursting into green, stood a squatter's log cabin, long deserted, its door and window gone, its roof of poles and bark half fallen in. Past the foot of the clearing, with dancing sparkle and a crisp, musical clamour, ran a shallow stream some dozen yards in width, its clear waters amber-tawny from the far-off cedar-swamps in which it took its rise. Along one side came the deeply rutted backwoods road, skirting the clearing and making its precarious way across the stream by a rude bridge not lightly to be ventured after dark. Over all the face of the lonely backwoods world was washed the high, thin green of the New Brunswick May-time

under a sky of crystal cobalt dotted with dense white fleeces.

Before the ruined cabin stood a light wagon, its wheels and polished body bespattered with mud. In the open back of the wagon, thrust well under the seat to be in the shade, lay a large wicker fishing-basket, with a tuft of grass sticking out through the square hole in the cover. Some ten or a dozen paces distant, tethered beneath the birch tree, a sorrel horse munched the last remnants of a bundle of hay, and whisked his long tail industriously to keep off the flies.

From behind a corner of the ruined cabin peered craftily a red fox. He eyed the wagon, he eyed the horse beneath the birch tree, he scrutinized the whole clearing, the road, and the open stretch of the stream. Then his narrowed, searching gaze returned to the wagon and to the fat basket in the back of the wagon. At length he stepped forth mincingly into full view, trotted up, and sniffed inquisitively. As if in doubt, he raised himself on his hind legs, with his fore-paws on the tyre of the nearest wheel, and took a long, satisfying sniff. Yes, un-

doubtedly there were fish in the basket, fresh fish—trout, in fact.

He wanted those fish exceedingly. It seemed easy enough to get them. He shifted his fore-paws to the back of the wagon and studied the situation. Why should he not climb up and help himself? The sorrel horse, catching a whiff of his pungent scent, looked around at him suddenly and snorted. But what did he care for the disapproval of the sorrel horse? All horses, submissive and enslaved, he held in profoundest scorn. He would have those trout, whether the horse liked it or not. And, anyhow, he saw that the horse was tethered to the tree. He settled himself back upon his haunches to spring into the wagon.

Then a new idea flashed into his cunning red head. No one who valued fresh-caught trout at their full worth would leave them thus unguarded unless for a sinister purpose. They were surely left there as a trap. The fox wrinkled his nose with mingled regret and disdain. He knew something of traps. He had once been nipped. He was not to be caught again, not he. What fools these men were, after all! His satisfaction at

having seen through their schemes almost compensated him for the loss of the expected meal. He drew back, sat down on his tail and eyed the wagon minutely for a while. Then he trotted away into the forest again to hunt wood-mice.

But it was just here that the red prowler's cunning overreached itself. The basket in the wagon was full of trout, and there was no trap to be feared. He might have feasted to his heart's content, and incurred no penalty more serious than the disapproval of the tethered horse, had he not been quite so amazingly clever. For even among the wild kindreds the prize is not always to him of nimble wit.

The trout were there in the basket simply because the fishing had been so good. The two fishermen who had driven out from town, in the grey dawn, over those fifteen miles of bad backwoods road, had fished the stream upwards from the bridge throughout the morning. At this season the trout—fine, vivid fish, of good pan size—were lying in the open, dancing runs and about the tails of the rapids ; and they were rising freely to almost any bright fly, though with a pre-

ference for a red hackle. Toward noon the fishermen had returned to the clearing to lunch beneath the birch tree and to feed and water the horse. They had emptied all their catch into one basket, stowed the basket under the wagon seat, then started off again to fish the finer reaches of the stream, with its wide pools and long, sunlit rapids, below the bridge. Good fishermen, but not expert woodsmen, they had no idea that, here in the solitude, they ran any risk of being robbed of their morning's spoils.

* * * *

Soon after the departure of the over-crafty fox, a backwoods tramp came by, with a ragged little bundle slung from the stick on his shoulder. His eyes lighted up at sight of the unguarded wagon from town, and he understood the situation at a glance. In the front of the wagon, by the dashboard, he found a lunch-basket, still half full, as the fishermen had provided themselves for another substantial meal. He hurriedly devoured about half the contents of the lunch-basket, transferred the rest to his dirty bundle, and with huge satisfaction lighted a half-burned cigar which one of the fishermen had left

lying on a log. Next he investigated the fishing-basket. Half a dozen of the finest fish he took out and strung upon a forked twig. This he did not regard as stealing, but merely as the exaction of a small and reasonable tribute from a Society which had of late neglected to feed him any too well. Puffing his cigar butt in high good humour, he went over and made friends with the horse, feeding it with a few handfuls of fresh grass. Then, with the string of fish dangling beside his bundle and flapping against it as he walked, he resumed his solitary journey, picked his way over the dilapidated bridge, and vanished into the fir forest beyond. The horse, feeling rather lonely, neighed after him as he disappeared.

An abandoned clearing or a deserted log cabin, something to which man has set his hand and then withdrawn it, seems always a place of peculiar fascination to the creatures of the wilderness. They have some sense, perhaps, of having regained a lost dominion. Or possibly they think, from these his leavings, to learn something significant of man's mysterious over-lordship. In any case, the attraction seldom fails.

The tramp had not been long gone, when a new visitor arrived. Up from the fringing bushes along the stream's edge came furtively a little, low, long-bodied beast, in shape much like an exaggerated weasel, but almost black in colour. Its head was nearly triangular; its eyes, set near together, were bright and cruel. It came half-way across the meadow, then stopped, and eyed for some time the tethered horse and the deserted wagon. Seeing nothing to take alarm at, it made a wide circuit, ran behind the cabin and reappeared, as the fox had done, at the corner nearest the wagon. From this point of vantage it surveyed the situation anew, a little spark of blood-red fire alternately glowing and fading in its eyes as its keen nostrils caught the scent of the fish.

Satisfied at length that there was no danger within range, the mink glided up to the wagon. The horse it paid no heed to. It circled the wagon a couple of times in a nervous, jerky run, its head darting this way and that, till its nose assured it beyond question that the fish it scented were in the wagon itself. Thereupon—for the mink lacks the fox's hair-splitting astuteness, and does

not take long to make up its mind—it clambered nimbly up through one of the wheels and fell straightway upon the fish-basket.

Now, the tramp, courteous in his depredations, had taken thought to refasten the basket. The mink was puzzled. The hole in the top of the basket, though he might have squeezed his head through it, was not large enough to let him reach the fish. He began jerking the basket and pulling it about savagely. The back of the wagon consisted of a hinged flap, and the fishermen had left it hanging down. The basket dragged this way and that, came presently to the edge, toppled over, and fell heavily to the ground on its bulging side. The fastening came undone, and the cover flopped half open. The mink dropped down beside it, flung himself upon it furiously, and began jerking forth and scattering the contents, tearing mouthfuls out of one fish after another in a paroxysm of greed, as if he feared they were still alive and might get away from him.

The basket emptied and his first rage glutted, the mink now fell to the business of making a serious meal. Selecting a fish to

his taste, he ate it at great leisure, leaving the head and the tail upon the grass. Then he picked out a larger one, as if he regarded the first as merely an appetiser.

As he gnawed luxuriously at the silver-and-buff, vermilion-spotted tit-bit, an immense shadow floated between him and the sun. He did not take time to look up and see what it was. It was as if the touch of that shadow had loosed a powerful spring. He simply shot from his place, at such speed that the eye could not distinguish how he did it, and in the minutest fraction of a second was curled within the empty fishing-basket, which still lay on its side, half open. A pair of long, black, sickle-curved talons, surmounted by thickly-feathered grey shanks, clutched at the place where he had stood.

Furious at having missed her strike, the great horned owl, that tigress of the air, flapped up again on her soundless, downy wings, and swooped suddenly at the basket, as if trying to turn it over. As her talons clawed at the wickerwork, feeling for a hold, the head of the mink, on its long, snaky neck, darted forth, reached up, and struck its fine white fangs into her thigh.

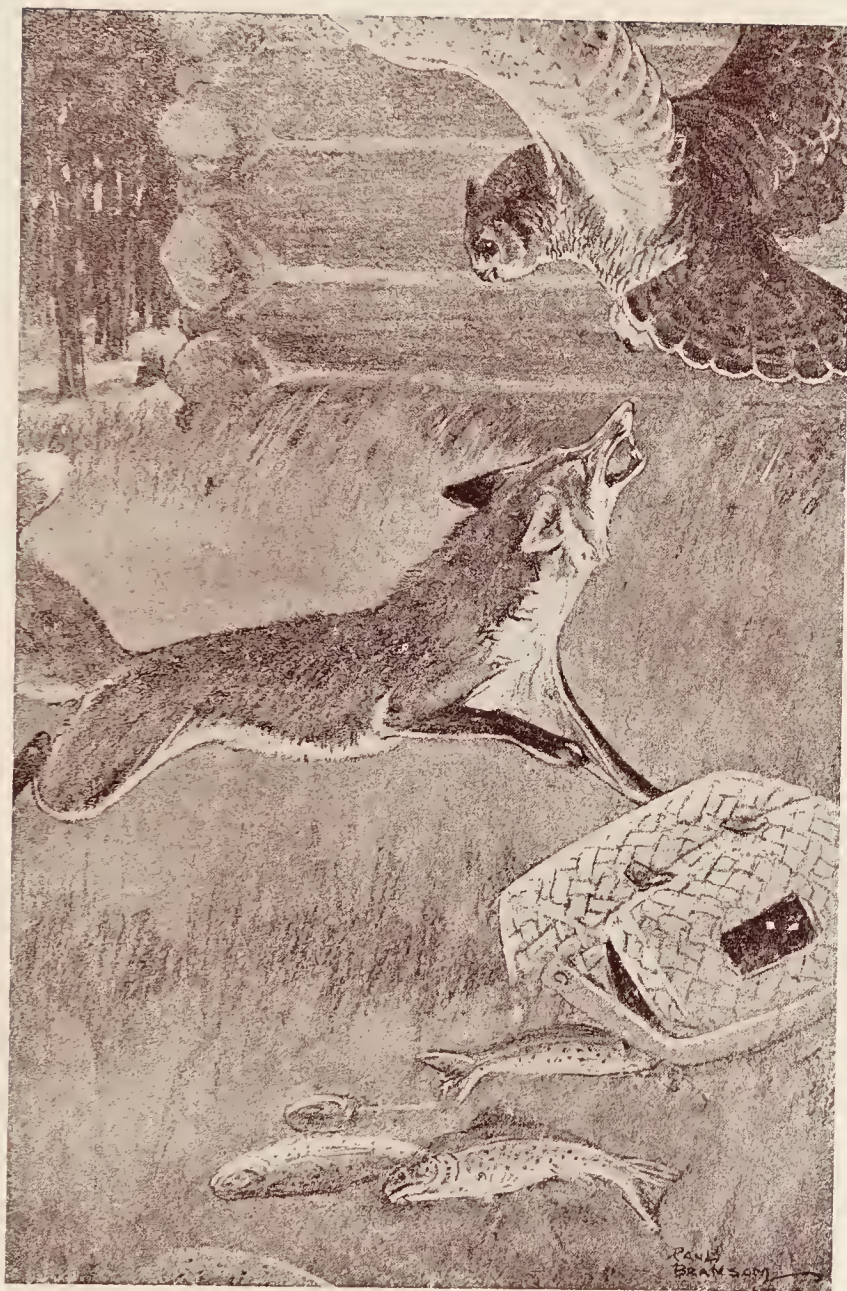
But the great owl's armour of feathers, though it looked so soft and fluffy, was in fact amazingly resistant. The mink's long teeth reached the flesh and drew blood, but he gained no grip. That steel-muscled thigh was wrenched from his jaws, leaving him with an embarrassing mouthful of down. He jerked his head into cover again, just as the bird made another lightning clutch at him.

For all his rage, the mink kept his wits about him. He knew the owl for one of his most dangerous rivals and adversaries. He knew that he could kill her if once he could reach her throat or get his grip fixed on one of her mighty wings close to the base. But that *if* kept him prudent. He was too well aware that in an open combat he was more than likely to get his neck or his back into the clutch of those inexorable talons, and that would be the end of him. Discreetly, therefore, he kept himself well within the basket, which was large enough to hold him comfortably. He snarled shrilly through the little square hole in the cover, while his assailant, baulked of her prey and furious with the smart of her wound, pounced once

more upon the basket and strove to claw an entrance. A chance blow of one of her pounding wings drove the lid—the basket being still on its side—completely to. The sorrel horse under the birch-tree swung round on his tether and rolled his eyes and snorted, deeply scandalized at such goings-on about his familiar wagon.

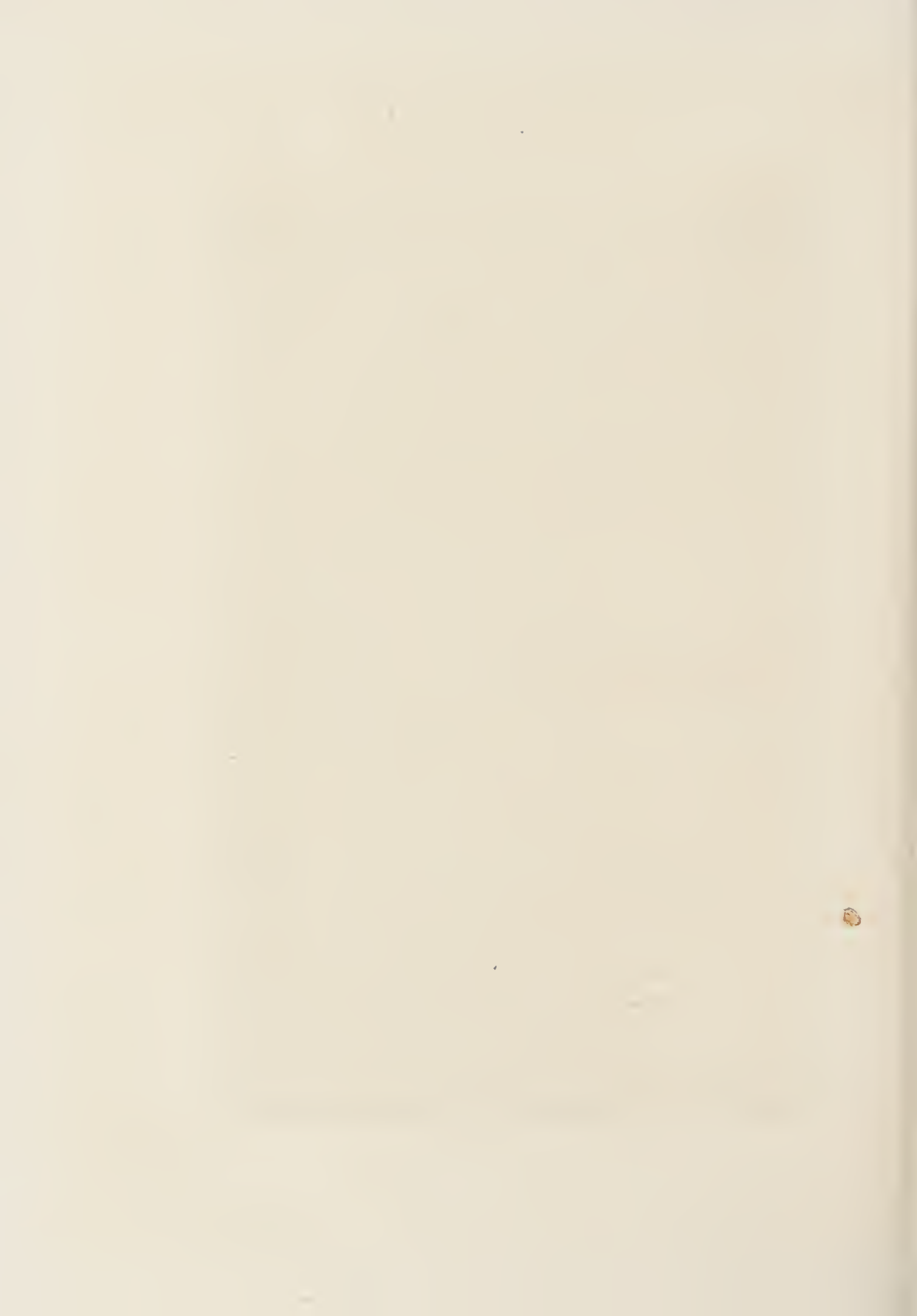
It was just at this point in the mink's adventure that the fox returned to the clearing. He had had rather poor luck with the wood-mice, and his chaps watered with the memory of those trout in the wagon. Something of an expert in dealing with traps, he made up his mind that he would try to circumvent this one.

The sight that met his shrewd eyes, as he emerged warily from the cover of the fir woods, amazed him. He halted to take it in thoroughly. He saw the basket lying on the ground, and the angry owl clawing at it. The fish he did not see. He concluded that they were still in the basket, and that the owl was trying to get at them. This particular kind of owl, as he knew, was a most formidable antagonist; but with his substantial weight and his long, punishing jaws,



"She sprang into the air without an effort."

The Secret Trails]



he felt himself much more than a match for her. His eyes flamed green with indignation as he watched her trying to steal the prize which he had already marked down for his own. He darted forward on tip-toe—noiselessly, as he thought—and made a long leap at the flapping, dusky wings.

But the ears of an owl are a very miracle of sensitiveness. They can catch the squeak of a mouse at a distance which, for ordinary ears, would make the sharp clucking of a chipmunk inaudible. To the bird on the basket the coming of those velvet footsteps were like the scamper of a frightened sheep. She sprang into the air without an effort, hung for a moment to glare down upon the fox with her hard, round, moon-pale eyes, and then sailed off without a sound, having no mind to try conclusions with the long-jawed red stranger.

The fox was surprised to find the trout lying scattered about the grass, some of them bitten and mangled. What, then, was in the basket? What was the great owl trying to get at, when the precious fish were all spread out before her? Curiosity dominating his hunger, he stepped up to the basket and

sniffed at the hole in the lid. Instantly there was a shrill, vicious snarl from within, and a wide-open, triangular mouth, set with white teeth, darted at his nose. He drew back hastily and sat down on his tail, ears cocked and head tilted to one side, to consider.

It puzzled him greatly that there should be a mink in the basket. Tip-toeing cautiously around it, he saw that the lid was slightly open, so that the mink could come out if it wished. But the fox did not want him to come out. What the fox wanted was fish, not a fight with an adversary who would give him a lot of trouble. By all means, let the mink stay in there.

Keeping a sharp watch on the lid of the basket, the fox backed away cautiously several feet, lay down, and fell to devouring the trout. But never for an instant did he take his eyes off that slightly moving lid. He lay with his feet gathered under him, every muscle ready for action, expecting each moment to find himself involved in a desperate battle for the prize he was enjoying. He could not imagine a fiery-tempered personage like the mink tamely submitting to

the rape of his banquet. He felt sure that in the next second or two a snaky black shape, all teeth and springs and venom, would dart from the basket and be at his throat. He was ready for it, but he was not hankering after it.

Meanwhile, there behind the basket lid, the mink was raging irresolutely. It galled him to the marrow to watch his big, arrogant, bush-tailed rival complacently gulping down those fine fat trout. But—well, he had himself already eaten one of the trout and a good part of another. His hunger was blunted. He could rage within reason, and his reason admonished him to keep out of this fight if it could be managed. He knew the whipcord muscle underlying that soft red fur, the deadly grip of those long, narrow jaws. There is no peace counsellor like a contented belly. So he snarled softly to himself and waited.

The fox, having swallowed as much as he could hold, stood up, stretched himself, and licked his chaps. The look which he kept upon the basket was no less vigilant than before, but there was now a tinge of scorn in it. There were still some trout left, but

he wanted to get away. He snatched up the two biggest fish in his jaws and trotted off with them to the woods, glancing back over his shoulder as he went.

Before he had gained the cover of the fir trees, the mink glided forth, planted his fore-paws on the remaining fish, and stood staring after him in an attitude of challenge. Had the fox returned, the mink would now have fought. But the fox had no thought of returning. There was nothing to fight about. He had got what he wanted. He had no rooted objection to the mink having what was left. He trotted away nonchalantly toward his burrow under the roots of an old birch tree on the hill.

The mink stuffed himself till he could not get another mouthful down. There were still a couple of trout untouched. He eyed them regretfully, but he had not the fox's wit or providence to carry them off and hide them for future use. He left them, therefore, with a collection of neatly severed heads and tails, to mock the fishermen when they should return at sunset. He was feeling very drowsy. At a deliberate pace, quite unlike his usual eager and darting move-

ments, he made off down the clearing toward the water. Beneath the bank was an old musquash hole which he was well acquainted with. Only the other day, indeed, he had cleared out its inhabitants, devouring their litter of young. He crawled into the hole curled up on the soft, dead grass of the devastated nest, and cosily went to sleep.

The Cabin in the Flood

STEPPING into the cabin, Long Jackson said: "If that there blame jam don't break inside o' twenty-four hour, the hull valley's goin' to be under water, an' I'll hev to be gittin' ye out o' this in the canoe. I've just been uncoverin' her an' rozenin' her up, an' she's as good as noo. That's a fine piece o' winter bark ye put on to her, Tom."

From his bunk in the dark corner beyond the stove, Brannigan lifted his shaggy face and peered wistfully out into the sunshine with sunken but shining eyes.

"I was *afeard* there'd be a powerful freshet after this long spell o' thaw atop of all that rain, Long, an' the snow layin' so deep in the woods this winter. I wisht ye'd lug me over an' lay me by the door in the sun fer a bit, Long, ef 'tain't too much trouble. That 'ere sun'll put new life into

me bones, in case the jam *don't* break, an' we hev to git a move on."

After this long speech, Brannigan's head dropped wearily back on the roll of blanket that served him as pillow. He had been desperately ill with pneumonia, so ill that it had been impossible for Long Jackson to go in to the Settlements for a doctor; and now, under Jackson's assiduous nursing, he was just beginning the slow climb back to life.

"Think 'twon't be too cold fer ye by the door?" queried Jackson anxiously.

"No, no!" protested Brannigan. "It's the sun I'm wantin', and the smell o' spring stirrin' in the buds. That's the med'cine fer me now, Long."

Long Jackson grumbled doubtfully, holding to the strange back-country superstition that fresh air is dangerous for sick folk. But he yielded, as he usually did where Brannigan was concerned. He spread blankets on the floor by the door—a little to one side to avoid the draught—then carried his partner's gaunt form over to them, and rolled him up like a baby, with his head well propped on a pile of skins. Then

he seated himself on the chopping-log just outside the door, and proceeded to fill his pipe with that moist, black plug tobacco, good alike for smoking and for chewing. which is chiefly favoured by the backwoodsman. Brannigan's face, drinking in the sunshine as a parched lawn drinks rain, freshened and picked up a tinge of colour. His eyes, long weary of the four grey walls of the cabin, roved eagerly the woods that fringed the tiny clearing.

"Anyways," said Long Jackson between puffs, as he sucked the damp tobacco alight, "this here knoll of ourn's the highest bit o' country fer ten miles round, and the cabin's on the highest p'int of it. 'Tain't raly likely the water'll come clean over it, ef the jam *don't* give inside o' twenty-four hour. But it makes one feel kind o' safe havin' the canoe ready."

"Yes, it's the highest bit o' country fer miles round," murmured Brannigan dreamily, soaking in the sun. "An' I'm thinkin' we ain't the only ones as knows it, Long. Will ye look at them rabbits down yander? Did ever ye see so many o' them together afore?"

Jackson looked, and involuntarily laid his

pipe down on the log beside him to look again. The woods far down the slope—it was a slope so gentle as to be hardly perceptible—were swarming with rabbits, hopping and darting this way and that over the snow. For the snow still lingered under the trees, though only a few patches of it, yellowing and shrinking under the ardent sun, remained in the open of the clearing.

After staring for some moments in silence, Jackson took up his pipe again.

“The water must be risin’ mighty quick,” said he. “Them rabbits are gittin’ sociable all of a sudden. They’re comin’ to pay ye a call, Tom, this bein’ yer fust day up.”

“We’ll be havin’ other callers besides rabbits, I’m thinkin’,” said Brannigan, the dreaminess in his voice and eyes giving way to a pleased excitement. This was better than his bunk in the dark corner of the cabin. “What’s that, now, way down behind them yaller birch trunks?” he added eagerly. “I guess it’s a bear, Long.”

“It’s two bear,” corrected Jackson. “So long as it’s jest rabbits, all right, but we ain’t entertainin’ bears this mornin’. Grub’s too scarce, an’ bears is hungry this time o’

year. Gee ! There's two more down by the spring. Guess I'd better git the gun."

"Wait a bit, Long," expostulated Brannigan. "They're so afeard o' the water, they'll be harmless as the rabbits. No good shootin' 'em now, when their pelts ain't worth the skinnin'. Let 'em be, an' see what they'll do. They hain't got no place else to go to, to git out o' the water."

"Let 'em climb a tree !" grumbled Jackson. But he sat down again on his log. "Ye're right, anyhow, Tom," he continued, after a moment's consideration. "What's the good o' spilin' good skins by shootin' 'em now ? An' if they're not too skeered to death to know they're hungry, they kin eat the rabbits. An', anyhow, the ca'tridges is pretty nigh gone. Come along, Mr. Bear, an' bring yer wife an' all yer relations !"

As if in response to this invitation, the bears all moved a little nearer, whining uneasily and glancing back over their shoulders, and close behind them could now be seen gleams of the swiftly up-creeping flood, where the sunlight struck down upon it through the leafless hardwood trees. But around to the left and the rear of the cabin

the trees were dense evergreens, spruce and fir, beneath whose shade the flood came on unseen.

As the worried bears approached, the belt of rabbits swarmed out along the edges of the clearing, the hinder ranks pushing forward the reluctant front ones. These, fearing the open and the human form sitting before the cabin, tried to regain shelter by leaping back over the heads of those who thrust them on. But far more than that unmoving human figure they feared the whimpering bears and the silent, pursuing flood. So in a very few minutes the rabbits were all in the open, hopping about anxiously and waving their long ears, a few of the bolder ones even coming up to within forty or fifty feet of the cabin, to stare curiously at Long Jackson on his log.

Presently from behind the cabin, stepping daintily, with heads held high and wide nostrils sniffing the air apprehensively, came two young does, and stopped short, glancing back and forth from Jackson to the bears, from the bears to Jackson. After a few seconds' hesitation, they seemed to make up their minds that they liked Jackson better

than the bears, for they came a few steps nearer and looked timidly in at Brannigan.

"This ain't North Fork Valley, Long. It's Barnum's Menagerie, that's what it's gittin' to be!" remarked Brannigan, speaking softly, lest he should alarm the does.

"Ay, an' still they come!" said Jackson, pointing with his pipe down the slope to the right. Brannigan lifted his head and craned his neck to see who "they" were.

They were a huge bull-moose, followed by three cows and a couple of yearlings, who crowded close upon their leader's heels as they caught sight of the bears. The great bull, though without antlers at this season, haughtily ignored the bears, who, as he well knew, would have small inclination to venture within reach of his battering hoofs. The little herd had been swimming. With dripping flanks, they stalked up through the trees and out into the clearing, the swarm of rabbits parting before them like a wave. At sight of Jackson on his log, the bull stopped and stood staring morosely. He was not afraid of bears, but men were another matter. After a heavy pondering of the situation, he led the way across the corner of

the clearing, then down into the flood again and off, heading for the uplands at the foot of the valley, some five or six miles away.

"He don't seem to like the looks o' ye, Long," murmured Brannigan.

"No more'n I do his'n," answered Jackson. "But I guess he'd 'a' been welcome to stop, seein' as we ain't standin' on ceremony, an' our cards is out to everybody. Come one, come all! But, no, I bar Mr. and Mrs. Skunk. Ye're a soft-hearted old eejut, Tom, an' never like to hurt nobody's feelin's, but I do hope now ye didn't go an' send cards to Mr. and Mrs. Skunk."

Brannigan chuckled. He was feeling better and more like himself already.

"I don't believe they'll be comin'," he answered, evading the point of the invitation. "Like as not, they're cut off in their holes an' drowned, 'less they've took to the trees in time. They ain't no great travellers, ye know, Long."

"I ain't puttin' on no mournin' fer 'em," grunted Jackson. "An' there's another varmint ye hadn't no call to invite, Tom," he added, as the rabbits again scattered in consternation, and a big lynx emerged from a

spruce thicket on which the flood was just beginning to encroach. The lynx, too frightened at the rising water to give even one look at the rabbits, glared about her with round, pale, savage eyes. As she caught sight of Jackson, her fur fluffed up and she scrambled into the nearest tree, where she crouched behind a branch.

Brannigan spared but a glance for the terrified lynx, his interest being largely absorbed in the two does, whose trustfulness had won his heart. Just inside the cabin door, and within reach of his arm, was a shelf, whereon stood a tin plate containing some cold buckwheat pancakes, or flap-jacks, left over from breakfast. A couple of these he tossed to the does. Gentle as was the action, the nervous beasts bounded backwards, snorting with apprehension. In a few moments, however, as if coming to realize that the movement of Brannigan's arm had not been a hostile one, they came forward again hesitatingly, and at length began to sniff at the pancakes. For some moments the sniffing was distinctly supercilious. Then one of them ventured to nibble. Half a minute more, and both flap-jacks had been

greedily gobbled. Their immense, mild eyes plainly asking for more of the novel provender, the pair stepped a little closer. Brannigan reached for another cake, to divide between them.

Long Jackson got up from his log, tapped the ashes from his pipe, and came into the cabin.

"I'll be leavin' ye to entertain the ladies, Tom," said he, "while I git dinner."

II

A CLOUD passing over the sun, the air grew sharply cold on the instant. Long Jackson bundled Brannigan away from the door, and shut it inexorably. But as Brannigan refused to be put back into his bunk, Jackson arranged him an awkward sort of couch of benches and boxes by the table, where he made his first "sitting-up" meal. After dinner, the sun having come out again, he insisted upon the door being once more thrown open, that he might drink in the medicine of the spring air and have another look at his menagerie.

"Holy Je-hoshaphat!" exclaimed Jackson,

as the door swung back. "This ain't no menagerie we've got here, Tom. It's a Noah's Ark, that's what it be!"

The two does, trembling with fright, were huddled against the wall of the cabin, close beside the door, staring at an immense and gaunt-framed bear, which was sitting up on its haunches on Jackson's chopping-block. More than half the clearing was under water. Five more bears sat near the chopping-block, eyeing the water fearfully and whimpering like puppies. Quite near them, and letting his shrewd eyes survey the whole scene with an air of lofty indifference, sat a red fox, his fur bedraggled as if from a long and hard swim. In two compact masses, on either side of the bears and the fox, and as far away from them as they could get, huddled the rabbits, their eyes fairly popping from their heads. Further away, standing hock-deep in the water, were half a dozen more red deer, afraid to come any closer to the bears. In the branches of the one tree—a spreading rock-maple—which had been left standing near the cabin, crouched a lynx and a wild-cat, as far apart as possible, and eyeing each other jealously.



“ ‘ This ain’t no menagerie we’ve got here, Tom. It’s Noah’s Ark,
that’s what it be!’ ”

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One of the bears, restless in his anxiety, shifted his position and came a little nearer to the cabin. The two does, snorting at his approach, backed abruptly into the doorway, jamming Jackson against the doorpost.

"Oh, don't mind me, ladies!" said Jackson, with elaborate sarcasm. "Come right along in an' set down!"

Whereupon the frightened animals, flying in the face of that tradition of the wild creatures which teaches them to dread anything like a *cul-de-sac*, took him at his word. Stamping their delicate hoofs in a sort of timorous defiance to the bears, and ignoring both Jackson and Brannigan completely, they backed into the rear of the cabin, stared about the place curiously, and at length fell to nibbling the hay which formed the bedding of the bunks.

"Did ever ye see the likes o' that for nerve?" demanded Jackson.

"They've got sense, them two," said Brannigan. "They know who'll stand up fer 'em if them bears begin to git ugly."

"But we don't want the whole kit an' calabash pilin' in on us," said Jackson with decision. "An' we don't want to shet the

door and not be able to see what's goin' on. neether. Guess I'd better fix up a kind o' barricade, so's I kin hold the pass in case of them there fee-rocious rabbits undertakin' to rush us."

With a bench and some boxes, he built a waist-high barrier across the doorway, and then he arranged for Brannigan a couch on the table, so that the invalid could look out comfortably over the barrier.

"Reserved seat in Noah's Ark for ye, Tom," said he.

"Hadn't ye better be fetchin' the canoe round to the front, where we kin keep an eye on to it?" suggested Brannigan.

"By Jing, yes!" agreed Jackson. "If one of them slick old bears 'd take a notion to h'ist it into the water an' make off in it, I guess we'd be in the porridge."

He hitched his long legs over the barrier and stalked out coolly among the beasts.

The wild-cat and the lynx in the branches overhead laid back their ears and showed their teeth in vicious snarls; and the rabbits huddled so close together that the two packs of them heaved convulsively as each strove to get behind or underneath his neighbours.

The bears sullenly drew away to the water's edge, and the huge fellow perched on the chopping-block jumped down nimbly from his perch and joined the others with a protesting *woof*. The fox stood his ground and kept up his air of indifference, his native shrewdness telling him that the man was paying no heed to him whatever. The deer also did not seem greatly disturbed by Jackson's appearance, merely waving their big ears and staring interrogatively. Jackson picked up the canoe and turned it bottom side up across the doorway. Then he stepped indoors again.

About the middle of the afternoon it became evident that the water had stopped rising. It had apparently found an overflow somehow, and there was no longer any risk of the cabin being swept away. Tired with the excitement, Brannigan fell asleep. And Jackson, with the backwoodsman's infinite capacity for doing nothing, when there is nothing to do, sat beside his barricade for hour after hour and smoked. And for hour after hour nothing happened. When night fell, he shut the door and secured it with special care.

Throughout the night it rained heavily, under a lashing wind which drove the rain in sheets against the rear of the cabin ; but soon after dawn the sun came out again and shone with eager warmth. Brannigan awoke so much better that he was able to sit up and help himself to the doorway instead of being carried. The two does, thoroughly at home in the cabin, swallowed the cold pancakes, and kept close to Jackson's elbow, begging for more.

When the door was opened, it was seen that the animals had all been driven round to the front of the cabin for shelter. The space under the upturned canoe was packed with rabbits. But the spirit of the bigger animals, with the exception of the deer, was now changed.

Since the rise of the flood had come to a halt—for the water was at the same mark as on the afternoon of the previous day—the predatory animals had begun to forget their fear of it and to remember that they were hungry. The truce of terror was wearing very thin. The fox, indeed, as Jackson's alert eyes presently perceived, had already broken it. At the very edge of the water,

as far away as possible from the cabin and the bears, he was sitting up demurely on his haunches and licking his chaps. But a tell-tale heap of bones and blood-stained fur gave him away. In the darkness he had stolen up to the rabbits, nipped one noiselessly by the neck, and carried it off without any of its fellows being any the wiser. He could afford to wait with equanimity for the flood to go down.

The lynx had come down out of her tree and was crouching at the foot of it, eyeing first the bears and then the rabbits. She turned her tameless, moon-pale eyes upon Jackson in the doorway, and bared her teeth in a soundless snarl. Jackson, wondering what she was up to, kept perfectly still. The next moment she darted forward, belly to earth, and pounced upon the nearest rabbit. The victim screamed amazingly loud, and the packed mass of its companions seemed to boil as they trampled each other underfoot. Growling harshly, the lynx sprang back to the tree with her prey, ran up the trunk with it, and crouched in a crotch to make her meal, keeping a malignant and jealous eye upon the wild-cat on her neighbouring branch.

As if fired by this example, one of the bears made a rush upon the luckless rabbits. He struck down two with a deft stroke of his paw, dashed them to one side to remove them from the too close proximity of Jackson, and lay down comfortably to devour them.

At this second attack, the unfortunate rabbits seemed to wake up to the necessity of doing something radical. Two or three of those nearest the cabin made a sudden dart for the door. They jumped upon the upturned canoe, stared fearfully for an instant at Jackson, then leapt past him over the barrier and took refuge in the farthest corner of the cabin, under the bunk. Jackson, according to his prearranged plan, had made an effort to stop them, but it was a half-hearted effort, and he shook his head at Brannigan with a deprecating grin.

"'Tain't exackly healthy for the blame little scuts, out there with the bear an' the wild-cats," said he apologetically. Jackson was quite ready to shoot rabbits, of course, when they were needed for stew; but his soft, inconsistent heart had been moved at seeing the helpless things mangled by the lynx and the bear. Perfect consistency, after

all, would be an unpleasant thing to live with in this excellent but paradoxical world.

The words were hardly out of Jackson's mouth when the rest of the bears came stalking up, great, black, menacing forms, to levy toll upon the rabbits. Instantly the frantic little animals began pouring in a tumultuous stream over the canoe and the barrier and into the cabin. Seeing their dinners thus unexpectedly disappearing, the bears made a rush forward.

Jackson, fearing lest they should charge straight into the cabin, sprang for his gun, and was back in the doorway again in a flash, carelessly thrusting aside with his feet the incoming flood of furry, hopping figures, but making no effort to keep it out.

The bears, reaching the packed and struggling rear rank of the fugitives before it could dissolve and gain the refuge, captured each a victim, and drew back again hastily with their prizes, still apprehensive of the silent grey figure of Jackson in the doorway. And in two minutes more all the rabbits were inside the cabin, covering the floor and struggling with each other to keep from being pushed too close to the hot stove.

The two does, resenting the invasion, snorted angrily and struck at them with their sharp, agile hoofs, killing several before the rest learned to keep out of the way. One enterprising little animal sprang into the lower bunk, and was straightway followed by the nearest of his fellows, till the bunk was filled to overflowing.

"How'll ye like it, sleepin' along o' that bunch o' bed-fellers, Tom?" inquired Jackson derisively.

"Ye'll sleep with 'em yourself, Long," retorted Brannigan from his place on the table. "*I* didn't let 'em in. They're *your* visitors. Me bein' an invalid, I'm goin' to take the top bunk!"

Long Jackson scratched his head.

"What's botherin' me," said he, grown suddenly serious, "is them bears. If *they* take it into ther heads to come in an' board along of us, I'm goin' to hev a job to stop 'em. I've only four ca'tridge left, an' ther's six bear. They've et ther rabbits, an' what's one small rabbit to a *rare* hungry bear? Here's the biggest an' hungriest comin' now! *Scat!*" he yelled fiercely. "*Scat!* You —!" And he added a string of backwoods

objurgation that this modest page would never consent to record.

Apparently abashed at this reception, the bear backed away hastily and glanced around at the landscape as if he had had no least thought of intruding.

Brannigan laughed as he had not laughed for weeks.

"That langwidge o' yourn's better'n any gun, Long!" said he.

"Guess it's saved us one ca'tridge, that time!" he acknowledged modestly. "But I'm thinkin' it won't keep 'em off when they get a mite hungrier. Ye kin curse like an Androseoggin lumber jack, but y'ain't goin' to frizzle a single hair on a bear's hide. Now, here they come agin! I'd better shoot one, an' mebbe that'll discourage 'em. Anyhow, they kin eat the one I shoot, and that'll keep 'em from hankerin' so after rabbits."

He raised his gun, but Brannigan stopped him sharply.

"Jest *shet the door*, ye old eejut!" he cried. "Ye know as well as I do that ef ye git a bear rale mad, an' he thinks he's cornered, there's goin' to be trouble. Jest shet the door, that's all!"

“ *To* be sure ! Why didn’t I think o’ that afore ? ” agreed Jackson, kicking the boxes aside and slamming the heavy door without ceremony in the face of the nearest bear, who had already lifted his fore-paws upon the canoe and was peering in wistfully at the rabbits.

With his feet in a foam of rabbits—the creatures seeming to have lost all fear of him—Jackson sat down on a box and lit his pipe, while Brannigan, leaning over from his couch on the table, tried to feed the rabbits with biscuits. The rabbits would have none of it, but the two does, greedy and jealous, came mincing forward at once to appropriate the attention and the tit-bits.

Presently the air grew unbearably hot and close, with the reek of the crowding animals and the heat of the stove. After the fashion of the backwoodsman, the men endured it till they were gasping. Then Jackson went to the little window—which was not made to open—and prised out the sash with the edge of his axe-blade. He filled his lungs with a deep breath, drew back from the window, then sprang forward again and thrust his head out for a better look.

" *It's broke !* " he shouted. " The water's goin' down hand over fist ! "

" It'll save a lot o' trouble," said Brannigan, with a sigh of relief.

By noon the water had disappeared, and the bears, the wild-cat, and the fox had disappeared with it. After waiting another hour, that the hungry beasts might be well out of the way, Jackson opened the door and began to turn the rabbits out. At first they refused obstinately to go, so that he had to seize them by the ears and throw them out. But presently some sign seemed to go round among them to the effect that their enemies were out of the way. Then they all began to make for the door, but quite at their leisure, and soon were hopping off among the trees in every direction. After them, at last, went the two does, without so much as once looking back.

" Durned if the place don't look kind o' lonesome without 'em ! " murmured Brannigan.

" Umph ! " grunted Jackson. " It's easy seein' 'tain't you that's got to do the cleanin' up after 'em. If ever ye go to hev another party like that, Tom, I'm goin' to quit."

The spring wind, mild and spicy from the spruce forests, breathed through the cabin from the open door to the open window, and a chickadee ran over his fine-drawn, bead-like refrain from the branches where the lynx and wild-cat had been crouching.

The Assault of Wings

IN his high place in the unclouded blue, a thousand feet above the topmost pinnacle of Bald Face, the great white-headed eagle stared downward toward the far-off reek and roofs of the busy town by the sea. It was not often that his eyes troubled themselves to turn in that direction, for all his concern was with the inland lakes and water-courses which linked themselves tranquilly about the spreading bases of Old Bald Face, and he hated the acrid smoke-clouds which rose from the chimneys of the town. But this morning his gaze—that miraculous vision which could scrutinize a rabbit or an ailing lamb at a distance when our best eyes would hardly discern an elephant—had been caught by an apparition which amazed and disconcerted him.

Flying in wide circles above a green field

on the outskirts of the city was a gigantic bird, in form and stature quite unlike any other bird that the great eagle had ever seen. As it passed over a red brick cottage at one corner of the field, quite blotting it from view for an instant, he got an impression of its incredible size, and felt, with a pang of angry dread, that his own stately dimensions would have seemed little better than a sparrow's beside it. Its vast white wings were square at the tip, and of the same width from tip to base—an inexplicable innovation in wings—and he noted with apprehension that they flew without any motion at all.

He himself, soaring in the blue heights as he was, flew *almost* without motion of the wings, riding by subtle poise and balance on the thrust of the light aerial draught. But even now, the breeze failing, he had to recover his impetus by a rushing descent. He tipped his snowy head and shoulders forward, and the air hissed sharply in the tense web of the hinder edges of his wings as he swept down the viewless slopes of air, turning upwards again after a swoop of a hundred yards or so, which was as nothing at that

height. A slow stroke or two restored him to his former level, with impetus to spare for his splendid effortless soaring. But, meanwhile, he had not taken his eyes for a moment from that portentous shape circling so mysteriously above the green field on the outskirts of the town, and he had not seen it either swoop or mount or once flap its flat-spread wings.

Moved from his accustomed arrogant indifference, the eagle flew over toward the town to get a better look at this disquieting phenomenon. On nearer approach he made out that the monstrous square-winged bird was ridden by one of those man-creatures whom he so hated and despised—ridden as he had seen, with wonder and scorn, that horses permitted themselves to be. The man sat in a hollow in the strange bird's back, between its wings, and seemed to master and guide it even as he would master and guide a horse.

The eagle hated man, because man was the only creature that had ever given him, hitherto, the loathed sensation of fear. He despised man because he saw the proud and cunning creature chained to earth, compelled

to crawl upon earth's surface even as a sheep or a woodchuck. But now, if man were able to ride the dwellers of the air, there would be no escaping his tyranny.

The eagle had been conscious for some moments of a curious humming roar in his ears, the source of which was not at once obvious to him. Suddenly he realized that it was the noise of the blunt-winged monster's flight. The realization daunted him. How was it possible that such an awful sound should come from those unmoving wings? He was inclined to turn and fly back to the shelter of Old Bald Face, but, after a moment's irresolution, his stout heart arose to the magnitude of the peril. He flew onward, till soon he was directly over the field, but so high that to the spectators around the edges of the field he was a scarcely visible speck against the blue.

At this moment the aeroplane began to mount skyward. It scaled the air swiftly in a steep spiral. The eagle was almost panic-stricken to observe that even now, when mounting so directly, it did not flap its wings, although there was no wind on which to rise. At the curious blunt beak of



“His courage and his curiosity gave way together, and he fled.”
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the monster he discerned a sort of circle of faint haze, a bluish blur, but this was something which did not seem to concern him, and he made no effort to understand it. What did concern him was the fact that the monster, with its human rider, was apparently coming up after him. His courage and his curiosity gave way together, and he fled back in a panic to his ledge in the recesses of Old Bald Face.

The extreme summit of Bald Face was a level plateau of granite some dozen of acres in extent, with a needle-like pinnacle of splintered granite at its eastern or seaward end. The broad south-eastern face of the summit was of naked granite, whitened by the storm and frost of ages, whence the name of Old Bald Face. But between this bleak, wind-harried front and the rich plain country by the sea were many lesser pinnacles and ridges, with deep ravines between, all clothed with dark spruce woods and tangled undergrowth. Around to full south and west and north lay an infertile region, thin-soiled and rocky, producing little timber but hemlock and stunted paper birch, and therefore not worth the attention of either the lumberman

or the squatter. The whole of this district was interlaced with watercourses and sown with lakes having their ultimate outlet in the tidal estuary which washed the wharves of the town.

If the land in this region skirting Old Bald Face was barren, its waters were not. They swarmed with fish—lake-trout, white fish, and huge suckers, as well as the ordinary brook-trout. They supplied hunting-ground, therefore, for not only a number of fish-hawks, but also for no less than three pairs of the fish-hawks' dreaded tyrants, the white-headed eagles. These three pairs of eagles had their nests in the uppermost and most inaccessible ledges of Bald Face ; and the wild country below was divided among them into six ranges, each great bird having his or her own hunting-ground, upon which not even their own mates could poach with impunity.

The nests of the three royal pairs were all within a distance of perhaps half a mile of each other, but each was austerey secluded and jealously hidden from its neighbours. Each pair regarded its neighbours with a coldly tolerant aversion, and kept an aloof

but vigilant watch upon them as possible poachers.

When the first eagle, smitten with fear by the vision of the swiftly-mounting aeroplane, fled back to his eyrie to warn his fierce-eyed mate of this portentous monster of the air, his perturbation was detected by the female of the next pair, who chanced to be homing at that moment with a fish for her hungry nestlings. Fear seems to travel by some uncomprehended but very efficient wireless, and fear in the lords of the air was a thing too unusual to be ignored. Hastily depositing her burden, the new-comer flapped upwards and around to the east, till she, too, caught sight of the mounting monoplane. It was far off, indeed, but already so high above earth that to her eyes it stood out dark and sinister against the pale expanse of sea beyond the town. She flapped over for a nearer view, flew close enough to hear the mysterious roar of the motor and to detect the man-creature riding the monster's neck, and fled back to her nestlings with rage and terror at her heart. No longer could she feel secure on the dizziest and remotest ledges of the peaks, no longer were even the

soundless deeps of sky inaccessible to man ! Within an hour every eagle of Bald Face knew of this dreadful invasion of their hitherto impregnable domain. It was the time of year when their nestlings were most helpless, and that is the time of year when the white-headed eagles will face all odds with an incomparable ferocity of valour at the hint of menace to their skyey homes.

* * * * *

The airman at the town of X—— was one Rob MacCreedy, who had recently been making a name for himself at the aviation grounds some hundred miles down the coast. He had come up to X—— primarily to turn a needed penny by exhibition flights and passenger-carrying over the spacious and level fields behind the town. But his secondary object was to experiment with the dangerous eddies and wind-holes that were likely to be met with above the profound ravines of Bald Face and its buttressing hills. His purpose was to go to Europe and win fame by some sensational flights over the Alps or the Pyrenees ; and having a very practical Canadian ambition to survive for the enjoyment of the fame he planned to

win, he was determined to prepare himself effectively for the perils that would confront him.

But MacCreedy had another object in view, which he did not talk about lest matter-of-fact folk should call him childish. He wanted to see what there was on top of Old Bald Face. That gaunt grey summit was regarded as practically unscalable. It had indeed been scaled, men said, some thirty or forty years ago, after desperate effort and altogether hair-raising adventure, by a greatly daring trapper, who had barely survived to tell of his exploit. Since then, the men of X—— not being whole-hearted or skilled mountain-climbers, all such attempts had ended in failure. Among the legends which had gathered about the austere summit, there was none to suggest that gold might be found thereon, else the cloudy sanctuary had doubtless been violated without unnecessary delay. But the traditions handed down from the adventure of that old trapper were as stimulating to MacCreedy's imagination as any myth of quartz vein or nugget could have been. They told of a remarkable level plateau, like a table for the

gods, with a little lake of black crystal set in the centre of it, ice cold and of unfathomable depth. It was, in effect, according to tradition, bottomless.

To MacCreedy's eager and boyish imagination this lofty plateau and this mysterious uninvestigated lake were irresistible. He was determined to know more about them both; and as the top of Bald Face, for all its inaccessibility, was less than five thousand feet above sea-level, his monoplane seemed to offer him an easy way to it.

The third day after MacCreedy's arrival at X—— was windless and without a cloud in the blue. The air almost sparkled with its clarity, and there was an unspringlike tang in it which made MacCreedy's nerves tingle for adventure. After he had given the crowd their money's worth in swift mountings and breath-taking *vols-planès*, he started off, at a height of some two thousand feet, toward the mountain, standing pallid and grim against the intense blue. He mounted swiftly as he went, and the spectators stared after him doubtfully, till they grasped his purpose.

“He's going to visit the top of Old Bald

Face ! ” went the murmur round the crowded edges of the field. And a feeling that he might bring back some interesting information made them content to wait, without grumbling, for his return.

Since their first sight of the giant-winged monster soaring and humming over X—— the eagles of Bald Face had not dared to venture far from home in their foragings. Their nerves were raw with angry anxiety for their nests. MacCreedy, as he came within a mile or two of the mountain, took note of an eagle not far ahead, circling at a higher level than himself.

“ The old bird thinks he can fly some,” mused MacCreedy, “ but I bet I’m going to give him the surprise of his life ! ”

A few moments more, and he was himself surprised, as the solitary sentinel was joined by another, and another, and another, till presently there were six of the great birds flapping and whirling between him and Bald Face, about at the level of the edge of the plateau.

“ Seem to be as interested in aeroplanes as any of us humans,” thought MacCreedy, and gave his planes a lift that should carry

him over the plateau at a height of not much over a hundred feet. He would make a hasty observation first, then circle around and effect a landing, if the surface looked smooth enough for him to attempt it without too much risk. He was surprised somewhat by the attitude of the eagles, who were now circling nearer, and seemed to be more angry than curious or terrified at his approach. Then his attention was abruptly withdrawn from their threatening evolutions. It was all required, and that urgently, by the aeroplane.

Having arrived over the deeply-cleft and ridged outworks of Bald Face, the aeroplane had plunged into a viewless turmoil of air-currents and vortices. It dropped with startling suddenness into a "pocket," and fell as if a vacuum had opened beneath it. Mac-Creedy saw a vicious granite ridge, whiskered with fir trees, lurch up at him insanely from a thousand feet below. He was almost upon it before his planes bit upon solid air again and glided off from the peril, slanting upwards rockingly over a gaping abyss. Yelping with triumph, the eagles had swooped down after him; but he could not hear their cries, of

course, through the roar of the Gnome, and of eagles, at that moment, he was thinking not at all.

Realizing the imminence of his danger from these vortices, MacCreedy changed his course and swept back again as fast as he could toward the open, his machine careering wickedly in the eddies and upthrusts of air. He decided that he must get far above this area of disturbance, and then spiral down directly over the plateau, where, as he calculated, the currents would be less tumultuous.

The eagles, imagining that the loud monster had been put to flight by their threats, came following in its wake, determined to see it safely off their premises and give it no time to recover from what they conceived to be its panic. But they were far too sagacious to attack and force a more than doubtful conflict. They were filled with awe of this gigantic being which flew with rigid wings and such appalling roar, yet allowed itself to be ridden by the man between its shoulders. They were perplexed, too, by the fierce wind which streamed out behind its level wings. Their amazement was heightened by the fact that their own long and

powerful wings, which were able to overtake so easily the flight of the agile fish-hawk, were forced to beat furiously in order to keep up with this incomprehensible stranger, who was apparently making no effort at all.

A swift motor-car, which had followed MacCreedy's flight at top speed across the plain, had halted at the point where the highway passed nearest to the broken and impassable region surrounding the mountain. Its occupants, watching MacCreedy's movements through their field-glasses, and noting the great birds crowding behind him, thought at first that the eagles had put him to flight and forced him to give up his venture. They were undeceived, however. Then they saw him turn—at such a height that, even to their powerful glasses, the pursuing eagles were no more than specks—and soar back till he was directly over the summit.

At the height which he had now gained the air was icy cold, but still as a dream. The world below looked like a vast, shallow bowl, the sides concaving upwards around him to the horizon. Two-thirds of this horizon rim were of dark green woods, threaded with the gleaming silver of water-

courses. The remaining third was of sea, which looked as if it overhung the town of X——, and were withheld only by a miracle from flowing in and filling the bowl. Directly beneath him, two to three thousand feet down, the mighty summit of Old Bald Face looked insignificant. It lay outspread quite flat and shelterless in the sun, its secrets clean revealed, and there, sure enough, at its centre, was the pool of tradition, gleaming upwards, glassy still. At the same time he saw, though without much interest, the eagles. They were very far below him now, hardly above the level of the plateau, flying in occasionally over its edges, but for the most part circling out above the surrounding gulfs. In a casual way MacCreedy inferred that they must have nests in the ledges of the precipices.

In a somewhat narrow spiral he now began his descent, gradually and under power, that he might be in full readiness to grapple with the treacherous gusts which came leaping up at him from under the brink of the plateau. He was surprised to see that, as he descended, the eagles rose hurriedly to meet him ; but at first he paid no attention to them, being intent upon the search for a

good landing-place, and upon the mystery of that sky-inhabiting pool. A minute or two more, however, and it was no longer possible for him to ignore the approaching birds, who were rising at him with unmistakable manifestations of rage. For the first time it occurred to him that they might be thinking he had come to rob their nests. "Plucky beggars," he said to himself admiringly, "to think of showing fight to a grown-up aeroplane!"

The next moment, as he noted the spread of those flapping wings, the shining, snowy outstretched head and necks, the sharp and formidable half-opened beaks, a sweat of apprehension broke out all over him. What if one of the misguided birds should foul his propeller or come blundering aboard and snap a stay or a control wire? The idea of being dashed to pieces in that skyey solitude was somehow more daunting to his spirit than the prospect which he faced indifferently every day—that of being hurled down upon familiar earth.

For a few seconds MacCreedy was tempted to drive his planes heavenward again and withdraw from the situation, to return another

day with a passenger and a shot-gun for his defence. Then he grew angry and obstinate. He had come to explore the summit of Bald Face, and he was not going to be baulked by a flock of birds. He was low enough now to satisfy himself that the plateau afforded a good landing, so he dipped his descent to a steeper angle, making haste to get through the suspense.

Immediately the eagles were all about him. To his relief, they seemed afraid to fly directly in front of him, as if apprehending that this monstrous bird of his might carry some terrible weapon in its blunt-faced beak. Mounting swiftly, they passed the descending aeroplane on either side, and then gathered in above it, swooping and yelping. Through the roar of his motor MacCreedy caught the strident shrillness of their cries. He felt that at any moment one might pluck up courage to pounce upon the plane or upon his head. He wondered if his leather cap would be stout enough to resist the clutch of those edged talons which he saw opening and shutting viciously above him. He wished himself safely landed.

He was low enough now to choose his

landing-place. He was just about to shut off the engine for the final glide, when one of the female eagles, growing desperate, swooped and struck the right wing of the plane not far from its tip. The extended talons went right through the cloth, tearing a long gash, and, before the bird could recover herself, she was caught by one of the strong wires that braced the wing. The aeroplane rocked under her struggles, but in the next moment she was thrown clear, so badly crumpled that she fell topsy-turvy through the air for some little distance before she could pull her wits together and right herself. Then, dishevelled and cowed, she flew off to one side, with no more stomach left for another assault.

MacCreedy had brought his plane to a level keel, the better to withstand the attack. Now he laughed grimly and resumed his descent. Almost in the same instant he realized that an immense eagle was swooping straight at his head. He ducked—the only way to save his face. The grasping claws sunk deep into his shoulders. With a yell he straightened himself backwards violently. His assailant, unable for a moment to free his claws from the tough tweed of the jacket,

and swept backwards by the rush of the plane, plunged down among the supporting stays, where he struggled and flapped wildly to extricate himself.

Smarting with pain and wrath, and with his heart in his mouth lest the stays should snap and the planes collapse, MacCreedy cut off the power and slid sharply downward. The eagle behind him got free, and flapped off, much daunted by the encounter. The remaining four birds hung immediately over the swiftly-dropping plane, but hesitated to attack after the rough experience of their fellows.

MacCreedy touched ground at somewhat higher speed than he had calculated upon, and found the level stone, swept by the storm of ages, so smooth that his wheels ran along it much too easily. Thus he found himself confronted by a new peril. Could he check himself before reaching the brink? He steered a long curve around the edge of the shining pool, gathered his legs under him so that he might jump clear, if necessary, and came to a stop with his vacillating propeller almost peering over the abyss. Just before him was a drop of a cool thousand feet. He

sprang out, hauled the machine back a dozen yards or so, and drew the longest breath of relief that had been forced from his lungs since his first ventures in aeroplaning.

Then he snatched the heaviest wrench from his tool kit and turned in a rage to settle accounts with his tormentors. But the eagles were now in a less militant frame of mind. Two of their number had had more than enough, and were already flapping back dejectedly towards their nests. The others seemed to realize that the monster, now that its rider had dismounted, was merely another of the man-creature's tools, such as a boat or a canoe, inanimate and harmless except when its dreaded master chose to animate it. Moreover, now that MacCreedy was out of the machine, erect upon his feet, glaring up at them with masterful eyes, and shouting at them in those human tones which the wild kindreds find so disconcerting, they were much more afraid of him than before. Their anger began to die away into a mere nervous dread and aversion. It seemed to occur to them that perhaps, after all, the man was not after their nests. He was nowhere near them. They yelped

indignantly at him, and flew off to perch on their eyries and brood over the problem.

MacCreedy watched them go, and dropped his weapon back into the kit. Then he went over his precious machine minutely, to assure himself that it had sustained no damage except that slit in one wing, which was not enough to give serious trouble. Then, with a rush of exultation, he ran over to examine the mysterious pool. He found it beautiful enough, in its crystal-clear austerity ; but, alas, its utter clearness was all that was needed to shatter its chief mystery. It was deep, indeed, but it was certainly not bottomless, for he could discern its bottom, from one shore or the other, in every part. He contented himself, however, with the thought that there was mystery enough for the most exacting in the mere existence of this deep and brimming tarn on the crest of a granite peak. As far as he could judge from his reading, which was extensive, this smooth flat granite top of Bald Face, with its little pinnacle at one end and its deep transparent tarn in the centre, was unlike any other known summit in the world. He

was contented with his explorations, and ready now to turn and tell about them.

But if content with his explorations, he was far from content on the score of his adventure with the eagles. He felt that it had been rather more of a close call than it appeared ; and there was nothing he desired less than an immediate repetition of it. What he dreaded was that the starting of the motor might revive the fears of the great birds in regard to their nests, and bring them once more swooping upon him. He traversed the circuit of the plateau, peering downward anxiously, and at last managed roughly to locate the three nests. They were all on the south and south-east faces of the summit. He decided that he would get off as directly and swiftly as possible, and by way of the north-west front, and by this self-effacing attitude he trusted to convince the touchy birds that he had no wish to trespass upon their domesticity.

He allowed himself all too brief a run, and the plane got into the air but a few feet before reaching the brink. So narrow a margin was it, indeed, that he caught his

breath with a gasp before she lifted. It looked as if he were going to dive into space. But he rose instead, and as he sailed out triumphantly across the abyss, the eagles came flapping up over the rim of the plateau behind. They saw that he was departing, so they sank again to their eyries, and congratulated themselves on having driven him away. A few minutes later, at an unprovocative height, he swept around and headed for home. As he came into view once more to the anxious watchers in the automobile, who had been worried over his long disappearance, the car turned and raced back over the plain to X——, ambitious to arrive before him and herald his triumph. But the fact that that triumph was not altogether an unqualified one remained a secret between MacCreedy and the eagles.

The Brothers of the Yoke

SIDE by side, in the position in which they were accustomed to labour at the yoke—Star on the off side, Buck on the nigh—they stood waiting in the twilight beside the pasture bars. From the alder swamp behind the pasture, coolly fragrant under the first of the dew-fall, came the ethereal fluting of a hermit thrush, most tender and most poignant of all bird songs. In the vault of the pale sky—pale violet washes of thin colour over unfathomable deeps of palest green—a wide-swooping night-hawk sounded at intervals its long, twanging note, like a stricken harpstring. The dark spruce woods beyond the barn began to give off their aromatic balsam-scent upon the evening air. A frog croaked from somewhere under the alders where the hermit was at his fluting. One of the oxen at last began to low softly and

anxiously. It was long past watering-time. Immediately his mate repeated the complaint, but on a harsher, more insistent key. The watering trough, full to the brim, was there in full view before them, just at the other side of the cabin. It was an unheard-of thing that their master should not come at sundown to lower the bars and let them drink their fill.

They were a splendid pair, these two steers, and splendidly matched. Both dark red, deep and massive in the shoulder, with short, straight horns, and each with a clean white star in the centre of his broad forehead, they were so exactly alike in all external particulars that the uninitiated eye would have been puzzled to distinguish them. Both stood also with the patient, bowed necks of those who have toiled long under the burden of the yoke. But to one at all acquainted with animals, at all versed in the psychology of the animal mind, the difference between the two was obvious. The temperaments that looked out from their big, dark eyes were different. The very patience of their bowed heads was different in expression. The patience of Star,

the off ox, was an accepting, contented patience. Curses, blows, the jabs of the ox-goad, he took mildly, as a matter of course, and, being his master's favourite, he got just as few of them as the exigencies of backwoods ploughing and hauling would permit. But with Buck it was far otherwise. In his eyes flickered always the spark of a spirit unsubdued. He had a side glance, surly yet swift, that put the observant on their guard. He never accepted the goad without a snort of resentment, a threatening shake of his short, sharp horns. And he had command of a lightning kick which had taught discretion to more than one worrying cur. Yet he was valued, even while distrusted, by his owner, because he was intelligent, well-trained, and a glutton for work, both quicker than his docile yoke-fellow and more untiring.

Between the two great red steers there was that close attachment which has been so often observed between animals long accustomed to working in the same harness. They become a habit to each other, and seem, therefore, essential to each other's peace of mind. But on the part of Buck it was

something more than this. Ill-tempered and instinctively hostile toward every one else, man or beast, he showed signs of an active devotion to his tranquil yoke-fellow, and would sometimes spend hours licking Star's neck while the latter went on chewing the cud in complacent acceptance of the attention.

The twilight gathered deeper about the lonely backwoods clearing. The night-hawk, a soaring and swooping speck in the pallid spaces of the sky, became invisible, though his strange note still twanged sonorously from time to time. The hermit hushed his fluting in the alder thicket. An owl hooted solemnly from somewhere back in the spruce woods. But still the owner of the oxen did not come to lower the bars and give admittance to the brimming trough. He was lying dead beside the brawling trout-brook, a mile or so down the tote-road, his neck broken by a flying branch from a tree which he had felled too carelessly. His dog was standing over the sprawled body, whining and pawing at it in distracted solicitude.

To the two thirsty oxen the cool smell of the waiting trough was cruelly tantalizing. To one of them it speedily became irresistible.

Buck was not, by instinct, any great respecter of bounds or barriers. He began hooking impatiently at the bars, while Star gazed at him in placid wonder. The bars were solid and well set, and Buck seemed to realize almost at once that there was little to be done in that quarter. Feeling for a weak spot, he worked his way along beyond them to the first panel of the fence. It was the ordinary rough "snake" of the backwoods clearing, a zigzag structure of rough poles, supported at the angles by crossed stakes. Never very substantial, it had been broken and somewhat carelessly mended at this particular point. The top rail lifted easily under the thrust of Buck's aimlessly tossing horn. It fell down again at once into its place in the crotch of the crossed stakes, and, in falling, it struck the fumbling experimenter a sharp whack across the nose.

The hot-tempered steer, already irritated, flared up at once, and butted heavily at the fence with his massive forehead. One of the cross-stakes, already half-rotted through, broke at once, and the two top rails went down with a crash. Following up this push,

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he threw his ponderous weight against the remaining rails, now left unsupported, breasted them down almost without an effort, and went crashing and triumphing through into the yard. His mate, who would never himself have dreamed of such a venture as breaking bounds, stared irresolutely for a few seconds, then followed through the gap. And side by side the two slaked their thirst, plunging their broad muzzles into the cool of the trough and lifting them to blow the drops luxuriously from their nostrils.

The impulse of Star was now to turn back into the familiar pasture, according to custom. But Buck, on the other hand, was used to being *driven* back and that always more or less under protest. For the first time in his memory, there was now no one to drive him back. He had a strange, new sense of freedom, of restraint removed. He was accustomed to seeing a light in the cabin window about this hour. But there was no light. The whole place seemed empty with a new kind of emptiness. Nothing was further from his fancy than to return to the pasture prison which he had just

broken out of. He stood with head uplifted, as if already the galling memory of the yoke had slipped from off his neck.

For a minute or two he stood sniffing with wide nostrils, drinking deep the chill, keen-scented air. It was the same air as he had been breathing on the other side of the pasture-bars, but it smelt very different to him. Something there was in it which called him away irresistibly into the dark, unfenced depths of the forest which surrounded the clearing. He turned his great head and lowed coaxingly to his partner, who was standing beside the gap in the pasture fence and staring after him in placid question. Then he started off with a brisk step down the shadowy, pale ribbon of the road.

Star's natural impulse, after drinking, was to return to the familiar, comfortable pasture ; but not without his yoke-mate. The stronger impulse ruled. With some reluctance and a good deal of bovine wonder, he swung around and hastened after Buck. The latter waited for him ; and side by side, as if in yoke, though with less labouring steps, they turned off the deeply rutted highway and moved silently down a mossed

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old wood road into the glimmering dark of the forest.

A sure instinct in Buck's feet was leading them straight away from the Settlements, straight into the heart of the wilderness. After perhaps an hour the wood-road led out of the thick forest across a little wild meadow with a shallow brook babbling softly through it. Here the two grazed for a time, almost belly deep in the thick-flow-ered grass, while the bats flickered and zig-zagged above them, and a couple of whip-poor-wills answered each other monotonously from opposite ends of the glade. Then they lay down side by side to chew the cud and to sleep, surrounded by the pungent smell of the stalks of the wild parsnip which their huge bulks had crushed down.

They lay in a corner of the glade, close to the dense thickets that formed the fringe of the woods. Unaccustomed to vigilance, neither their eyes nor their ears were on the alert. A lynx crept up behind them, within a dozen paces, glared at them vindictively with its pale, malignant moon-eyes, and then ran up a tree to get a better look at these mighty intruders upon his hunting-ground.

His claws made a loud rattling on the bark as he climbed, but neither of the oxen paid any attention whatever to the sound. Of course, a lynx could not, under any circumstances, be anything more than an object of mild curiosity to them, but had it been a pair of hungry panthers, they would have been equally unconscious and unwarned. They lay with their backs to the forest, looking out across the open, chewing lazily, and from time to time heaving windy breaths of deep content. Not a score of yards before their noses a trailing weasel ran down and killed a hare. At the cry of the victim Buck opened his half-closed eyes and gave a snort of disapproval. But Star paid no attention whatever to the little tragedy. All his faculties were engrossed upon his comfort and his cud.

A little later a prowling fox came suddenly upon them. He was surprised to find the pair so far from their pasture, where he had several times observed them in the course of his wide wanderings. His shrewd mind jumped to the idea that perhaps the settler, their master, was out with them ; and while he had no objection whatever to the oxen—

stupid, harmless hulks in his eyes—he had the most profound objection to their master and his gun. He slipped back into cover, encircled the whole glade stealthily till he picked up their trail, and satisfied himself that they had come alone. Then he returned and sat down on his tail deliberately in front of them, cocking his head to one side, as if inviting them to explain their presence.

Star returned his gaze with placid indifference, but Buck was annoyed. In his eyes the fox was a little sharp-nosed dog with a bushy tail and an exasperating smell. He hated all dogs, but especially little ones, because they were so elusive when they yapped at his heels. He heaved himself up with an angry snort, and charged upon the intruder. The fox, without losing his dignity at all, seemed to drift easily out of reach, to this side or that, till the ox grew tired of the futile chase. Moreover, as the fox made no sound and no demonstration of heel-snapping, Buck's anger presently faded out, and he returned to his partner's side and lay down again. And the fox, his curiosity satisfied, trotted away.

A little later there came a stealthy crashing

through the darkness of the underbush in the rear. But the two oxen never turned their heads. To them the ominous sound had no significance whatever. A few paces behind them the crashing came to a sudden stop. A bear, lumbering down toward the brook-side, to grub in the soft earth for edible roots, had caught the sound of their breathing and chewing. He knew the sound, for he, too, like the fox, had prowled about the pasture fence at night. As noiselessly as a shadow he crept nearer, till he could make out the contented pair. He knew they belonged to the man, and it made him uneasy to see them there, so far from where they belonged. He sniffed the air cautiously. to see if the man was with them. No, the man was not there, that was soon obvious. He had no thought of attacking them ; they were much too formidable to be meddled with. But why were they there ? The circumstance was, therefore, dangerous. Perhaps the man was designing some sort of trap for him. He drew back cautiously, and made off by the way he had come. He had a wholesome respect for the man, and for all his works and belongings.

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In the first, mysterious, glassy grey of dawn, when thin wisps of vapour clung curling among the grass-tops, the two wanderers got up and fell to grazing. Then Star, who was beginning to feel homesick for old pasture fields, strayed away irresolutely toward the road for home. Buck, however, would have none of it. He marched off toward the brook, splashed through, and fell to pasturing again on the farther side. Star, not enduring to be left alone, immediately joined him.

That day the pair pressed onward, deeper and deeper into the wilds, Buck ever eager on the unknown quest, Star ever reluctant, but persuaded. As a matter of fact, had Star been resolute enough in his reluctance, had he had the independence to lie down and refuse to go farther, he would have gained the day, for Buck would never have forsaken him. But initiative ruled inertia, as is usually the case, and Buck's adventuring spirit had its way.

It was a rugged land, but hospitable enough to the wanderers in this affluent late June weather, through which Buck so confidently led the way. The giant tangle of

the forest was broken by frequent wild meadows, and foaming streams, and lonely little granite-bordered lakes, and stretches of sun-steeped barren, all bronze green with blueberry scrub. There was plenty to eat, plenty to drink, and when the flies and the heat grew troublesome, it was pleasant to wallow in the cold, amber-brown pools. Even Star began to forget the home pasture, and content himself with the freedom which he had never craved.

How far and to what goal the urge in Buck's untamed heart would have carried them before exhausting itself, there is no telling. But he had challenged without knowledge the old, implacable sphinx of the wilderness. And suddenly, to his undoing, the challenge was accepted.

On the third day of their wanderings the pair came out upon a river too deep and wide for even Buck's daring to attempt to cross. The banks were steep—a succession of rocky bluffs, broken by deep lateral bayous, and strips of interval meadows where brooks came in through a fringe of reeds and alders. Buck turned northward, following the bank up stream, sometimes

close to the edge, sometimes a little way back, wheresoever the easier path or the most tempting patches of pasturage might seem to lead. He was searching always for some feasible crossing, for his instinct led him always to get over any barrier. That his path toward the west had been barred only confirmed him in his impulse to work westward.

Late that afternoon, as they burst out, through thick bushes, into a little grassy glade, they surprised a bear-cub playing with a big yellow fungus, which he boxed and cuffed about—carefully, so as not to break his plaything—as a kitten boxes a ball. To Buck, of course, the playful cub was only another dog, which might be expected to come yapping and snapping at his heels. With an indignant snort he charged it.

The cub, at that ominous sound, looked up in astonishment. But when he saw the terrible red form dashing down upon him across the grass, he gave a squeal of terror and fled for the shelter of the trees. He was too young, however, for any great speed or agility, and he had none of the dog's

artfulness in dodging. Before he could gain cover he was overtaken. Buck's massive front caught him on his haunches, smashing him into the ground. He gave one agonized squall, and then the life was crushed out of him.

Amazed at this easy success—the first of the kind he had ever had—but immensely proud of himself, the great red ox drew off and eyed his victim for a second or two, his tail lashing his sides in angry triumph. Then he fell to goring the small black body, and tossing it into the air, and battering it again with his forehead as it came down. He was taking deep vengeance for all the yelping curs which had worried and eluded him in the past.

In the midst of this congenial exercise he caught sight, out of the corner of his eye, of a big black shape just hurling itself upon him. The mother bear, a giant of her kind, had come to the cry of her little one.

Buck whirled with amazing nimbleness to meet the attack. He was in time to escape the blow which would have cracked even his mighty neck, but the long, steel-hard claws of his assailant fairly raked off one side of

his face, destroying one eye completely. At the same time, with a shrill bellow, he lunged forward, driving a short, punishing horn deep into the bear's chest and hurling her back upon her haunches.

Dreadful as was his own injury, this fortunate thrust gave him the advantage for the moment. But, being unlearned in battle, he did not know enough to follow it up. He drew back to prepare for another charge, and paused to stamp the ground, and bellow, and shake his horribly wounded head.

The mother, heedless of her own deep wound, turned to sniff, whimpering, at the body of her cub. Seeing at once that it was quite dead, she wheeled like a flash and hurled herself again upon the slayer. As she wheeled she came upon Buck's blinded side. He lunged forward once again, mad for the struggle. But this time, half blind as he was, he was easily eluded, for the old bear was a skilled fighter. A monstrous weight crashed down upon his neck, just behind the ears, and the bright green world grew black before him. He stumbled heavily forward on knees and muzzle, with a choking bellow.

The bear struck again, and with the other paw tore out his throat, falling upon him and mauling him with silent fury as he rolled over upon his side.

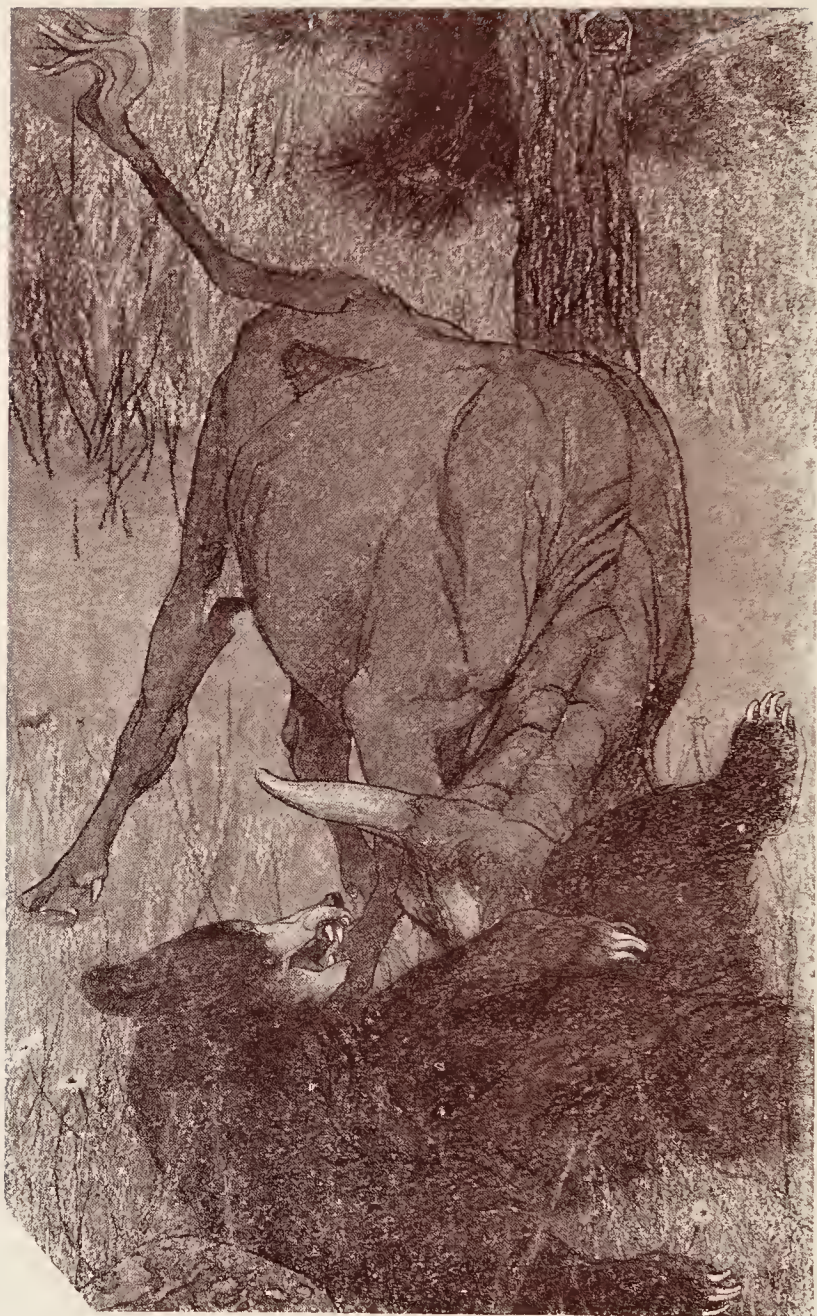
Star, meanwhile, being ever slow of wit and of purpose, had been watching with startled eyes, unable to take in the situation, although a strange heat was beginning to stretch his veins. But when he saw his yoke-mate stumble forward on his muzzle, when he heard that choking bellow of anguish, then the unaccustomed fire found its way up into his brain. He saw red, and, with a nimbleness far beyond that of Buck at his swiftest, he launched himself into the battle.

The bear, absorbed in the fulness of her vengeance, was taken absolutely by surprise. It was as if a ton of rock had been hurled against her flank, rolling her over and crushing her at the same time. In his rage the great red ox seemed suddenly to develop an aptitude for the battle. Twisting his head, he buried one horn deep in his adversary's belly, where he ripped and tore with the all-destructive fury of a mad rhinoceros. The bear's legs closed convulsively about his



“ When he saw his yoke-mate stumble
forward on his muzzle . . . ”

The Secret Trails]



"... he launched himself into the battle."

The Secret Trails]

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head and shoulders, but in the next instant they relaxed again, falling away loosely as that ploughing horn reached and pierced the heart. Then Star drew back, and stood shaking his head to clear the blood out of his eyes.

For two days and nights Star stood over his yoke-mate's body, leaving his post only for a few yards and for a few minutes, at long intervals, to crop a mouthful of grass or to drink at that cold stream which ran past the edge of the tragic glade. On the third day two woodsmen, passing down the river in a canoe, were surprised to hear the lowing of an ox in that desolate place, far from even the remotest settler's cabin. The lowing was persistent and appealing. They went ashore and investigated.

At the scene which they came upon in the sunny little glade they stood marvelling. After a time their shrewd conjectures, initiated as they were in all the mysteries of the wild, arrived at a fairly accurate interpretation of it all.

"It was sure some scrap, anyhow," was the final conclusion of one grizzled investigator; and "Wish't we could 'a' seen it," of the

other. Then, the big red ox, with blood caked over head and horns, being too admired as well as too valuable to be left behind, they decided that one of them should stop on shore and drive him, while the other followed slowly in the canoe.

At first Star refused stolidly to budge from his dead comrade's side. But the woodsman was in winter a teamster, and what he did not know about driving oxen was not worth knowing. He cut a long white stick like an ox-goad, took his place at Star's side, gave him a firm prod in the flank, and cried in a voice of authority: "Haw, Bright!"

At the old command, although "Bright" was not the right name, Star seemed once more to feel the familiar, and to him not unpleasant, pressure of the yoke upon his neck. He swerved obediently to the left, lowering his head and throwing his weight forward to start the imaginary load, and moved away as his new master ordered. And gradually, as he went, directed this way or that by the sharp commands of "Gee!" or "Haw!" and the light reminder of the goad, his grief for his yoke-fellow began to

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dull its edge. It was comforting to be once more controlled, to be snatched back into servitude from a freedom which had proved so strenuous and so terrible.

The Cabin Door

WHAT was known as the County Line Road, though in winter a highway of some importance for the sleds and sleighs of the lumbermen, was in summer little more than a broad, straight trail, with grass and wild flowers growing undisturbed between the ruts. Just now, in the late and sodden Northern spring, it was a disheartening stretch of hummocks and bog-holes, the bog-holes emphasized by a leg-breaking array of half rotten poles laid crossways. It was beautiful, however, in its lonesome, pallid, wistful fashion, for its hummocks, where dry enough, were already blueing tenderly with the first violets, its fringes were sparsely adorned with the shy blooms of wind-flower, dog-tooth, and hepatica, and scattered through the dark ranks of the fir trees on either side were little colonies of white birch or silver

poplar, just filming with the first ineffable green.

To the slim girl who, bundle in hand and with skirts tucked up half-way to the knee, was picking her steps along this exasperating path, the wildness of the scene—its mingled harshness and delicacy—brought a pang which she could but dimly understand. The pale purpling of the violets, the aerial greening of the birch tops against the misty sky, the solemnity of the dark, massed fir trees—it was all beautiful in her eyes beyond anything words could suggest, but it made her heart ache with something like an intolerable homesickness. This was incomprehensible to her, since she was already, in a sense, at home. This was her native wilderness, this was the kind of chill, ethereal, lonesome spring which thrilled through the memories of her childhood. And she was nearing—she could not now be more than twelve miles from—the actual home of her childhood, that grey cabin on the outskirts of the remote and wind-swept settlement of Stony Brook.

For the past three years—going on for four now, indeed—Sissy Bembridge had been away from this wild home, working hard, and

saving her wages, in the big shoe factory at K——, down by the sea. Called home suddenly by word that her mother was ill, she had come by train to the end of the Branch, and tried to get a rig to take her around by the main road to Stony Brook. There was no rig to be had for love or money. Too anxious to wait, and confident in her young vigour, she had left her luggage, tied up a few necessities and eatables in a handy bundle, and set out by the short cut of the old Line Road. Deaf to all dissuasions, she had counted on making Stony Brook before nightfall. Moreover—though she would never have acknowledged to herself that such a consideration could count for anything when all her thoughts were on her mother's illness—she was aware of the fact that Connor's gang was stream-driving on the Ottanoonsis, and would be by now just about the point where the Line Road touched the river. Mike Farrell would be on the drive, and if she should chance to pass the time o' day with him, and let him know she was at home—why, there'd be no harm done to anybody.

For hours the girl trudged on, picking her way laboriously from side to side of the trail,

and often compelled to stop and mend a bit of the corduroy roadway before she could get across some particularly bad stretch of bog. Her stout shoes and heavy woollen stockings were drenched with the icy water, but she was strong and full of abounding health, and she felt neither cold nor fatigue. In spite of her anxiety about her mother, her attention was absorbed by the old familiar atmosphere of the wilderness, the haunting colours, the chill, elusive, poignant smells. It was not till fairly well along in the afternoon, therefore, that she awoke to the fact that she had not covered more than half the distance which she had to travel. The heavy going, the abominable state of the road, had utterly upset her calculations. The knowledge came to her with such a shock that she stopped short in consternation, almost dropping her bundle. At this rate she would be in the forest all night, for it would be impossible to traverse the bog-holes in the dark. Child of the backwoods though she was, she had never slept out alone with the great trees and the mysterious night stillness. For the first time she cast a look of dread into the vistaed shadows of the fir trees. Forgetting the

violets, the greening birches, the delicate spring smells, she hurried on at a reckless pace which soon forced her to stop and recover her breath. The best she could hope was to reach the river-shore before dark, and perhaps find the camp of the stream-drivers. She felt cold, and tired, and small, and terribly alone.

Yet, as a matter of fact, she was by no means so alone as she imagined. For the past half-hour or more she had been strangely companioned.

Keeping parallel with the road, but at a distance, and hidden in the shadows, went an immense and gaunt black bear. For all his bulk, he went as noiselessly as a wild-cat, skirting the open spaces, and stopping from time to time to sit up, motionless as a stump, and listen intently, and sniff the air with sensitive nostrils. But his little, red-rimmed, savage eyes never lost sight of the figure of the girl for more than a few seconds at a time.

For bears this was the hungry season, the season of few roots and no fruits, few grubs and little honey. The black bear loves sweets and berries far better than any



“ Never lost sight of the figure of the girl for more than a few seconds
at a time.”

The Secret Trails]

flesh food, however dainty. And human flesh he either fears or dislikes so heartily that only under special stress can he bring himself to contemplate it as a possible article of diet. But this bear considered himself under special stress. His lean flanks were fairly clinging together from emptiness. To his eyes, thus prejudiced, the fresh young form of Sissy Bembridge, picking its way down the trail, looked appetizing. Girl was something he had never tried, and it *might* be edible. At the same time, this inoffensive and defenceless-looking creature undoubtedly belonged to the species Man, as his nostrils well assured him. Therefore, small as she was, she was apt to be very dangerous, even to go off at times with flame and a terrifying noise. He was afraid to show himself to her, but his hunger, coupled with curiosity, led him to track her, perhaps in the hope that she might fall dead in the trail and so make it safe for him to approach and taste.

The girl, meanwhile, under the influence of her uncertainty and fatigue, was growing more and more apprehensive. She assured herself that there was nothing to fear, that

none of the wild inhabitants of these New Brunswick woods would dare to interfere with a human being. At the same time she found herself glancing nervously over her shoulder, as the shadows lengthened and deepened, and all the wilderness turned to dusky violet. From the wet pools began the cold and melancholy fluting of the frogs, the voice of solitude, and under the plangency of it she found the tears running down her cheeks. At this she shook herself indignantly, squared her shoulders, stamped her foot, and plunged ahead with a firm resolution that the approach of dark should *not* make her a fool. And away in the shadows of the firs the bear drew a little nearer, encouraged by the fading of daylight.

Just as it was growing so dark that she found it hard to choose her path between the pools and the bog-holes, to her infinite relief she caught sight of a cabin roof crowning a little rise of ground by the roadside. She broke into a run in her eagerness, reached the door, and pounced upon it breathlessly. But there was no light in the window. With a sinking heart she realized that it was empty—that it was nothing more than a deserted

lumber-camp. Then, as if in answer to her vehement knocking, the door swung slowly open, showing the black darkness within. It had been merely closed, not latched. With a startled cry she sprang back, her skin creeping at the emptiness. Her first impulse was to turn and run. But she recovered herself, remembering that, after all, here was shelter and security for the night, infinitely preferable to a wet bivouac beneath some dripping fir tree.

She could not bring herself, however, to grope her way into the thick darkness of the interior. Stepping some paces back from the threshold, she nervously untied her bundle and got out a box of matches. Lighting one, she shaded it with her hand, crept forward, and cautiously peered inside. In the spurt of light the place looked warm and snug. She returned for her bundle, went in and shut the door. Then she drew a long breath and felt better. The camp was small, but dry and in good repair. It was quite empty, except for the tier of bunks along one wall, a rough-hewn log bench, a broken stove before the rude chimney, and several lengths of rust-eaten stove-pipe scattered on the

floor. Lighting match after match, she hunted about for something to serve as fuel, for she craved the comfort as well as the warmth of a fire.

There was nothing, however, but a few handfuls of dry, fine spruce tips, left in one of the bunks. This stuff, she knew, would flare up at once and die in a couple of minutes. She made up her mind to go out and grope about in the wet gloom for a supply of dead branches, though she was now conscious of a childish reluctance to face again the outer solitude. Almost furtively she lifted the heavy latch and opened the door half-way. Instantly, with a gasp, she slammed it to again and leaned against it with quaking knees. Straight in front of her, not twenty feet away, black and huge against the grey glimmer of the open, she had seen the prowling bear.

Recovering herself after a few seconds, she felt her way stealthily to the bench and sat down upon it so as to face the two windows. The windows were small—so small that she was sure no monster such as the one which had just confronted her could by any possibility force its way through them.

But she waited in a sort of horror, expecting momentarily that a dreadful shadowy face would darken one or the other of them and glare in upon her. She felt that the eyes of it would be visible by their own light, and she summoned up all her resolution that she might not scream when it appeared. For the time, however, nothing of the sort took place, and the two little squares continued to glimmer palely.

After what seemed to her an hour of breathless waiting, she heard a sound as of something rubbing softly along the logs of the back wall. She swung around on her seat to stare with straining eyes at the spot where the sound came from. But, of course, all was blackness there. And she could not keep her eyes for more than a few seconds from the baleful fascination of the window-squares.

The door of the camp was a heavy one and sturdily put together, but along its bottom was a crack some half an inch in width. Presently there came a loud sniffing at this crack, and then the door creaked, as if a heavy body were leaning against it. She shuddered and gathered herself together

for a desperate spring, expecting the latch or the hinges to give way. But the honest New Brunswick workmanship held, and she took breath again with a sob.

After this respite, a thousand fantastic schemes of defence began to chase themselves through her brain. Out of them all she clung to just one, as possibly offering some hope in the last emergency. Noiselessly she gathered those few handfuls of withered spruce twigs and heaped them upon the top of the stove. If the bear should succeed in squeezing through the window or breaking down the door, she would light the dry stuff, and perhaps the sudden blaze and smoke might frighten him away. That it would daunt him for a moment, she felt sure, but she was equally sure that its efficacy would not last very long.

As she was working up the details of this scheme—more for the sake of keeping her terror in check than for any great faith she had in it—the thing she had been expecting happened. One of the glimmering grey-blue squares grew suddenly dark. She gave a burst of shrill, hysterical laughter and ran at it, as a trapped rat will jump at a hand

approaching the wires. As she did so, she scratched a bunch of four or five matches and threw them, spluttering and hissing, in the face of the apparition. She had a glimpse of small, savage eyes and an open, white-fanged mouth. Then the great face withdrew itself.

Somewhat reassured to find that the monster could be disconcerted by the spurt of a match, she groped back to her seat, and fell to counting, by touch, the number of these feeble weapons still left in the box. She had only six more, and she began to repent of having used the others so recklessly. After all, as she told herself, *that* bear could not possibly squeeze himself through the window, so why should he not amuse himself by looking in at her if he wanted to? It might keep him occupied. It occurred to her that she ought to be glad that the bear was such a big one. His face alone had fairly filled the window. She would save the remaining matches.

For a good ten minutes nothing more happened, though from time to time her intent ears caught the sound of cautious sniffing on the other side of the log walls,

as if the enemy were reconnoitring to find a weak point in her fortress. She smiled scornfully there in the dark, knowing well the strength of those log walls. Then, all at once her face stiffened and she sat rigid, clutching the edge of the bench with both hands. The door had once more begun to creak and groan under the weight of a heavy body surging against it.

There was a sound of scratching, a rattle of iron claws, which told her that the beast was rearing itself upright against the door. The massive paws seemed to fumble inquisitively. Then her blood froze. She heard the heavy latch lift with a click.

The door swung open.

She felt as if she were struggling in a nightmare. With a choked scream she leapt straight at the door. She had a mad impulse to slam it in the monster's face and brace herself, however impotently, against it. As she sprang, however, her foot caught in one of the pieces of stove-pipe. She fell headlong, and the pipe flew half-way across the floor, clattering over its fellows as it went, and raising a prodigious noise.

Through a long, long moment of horror

she lay flat on her face, expecting a gigantic paw to fall upon her neck as a cat's paw falls upon a mouse. Nothing happened. She ventured to raise her head. The door was wide open and the doorway quite clear. A dozen feet away from it, at the edge of the road, stood the bear, staring irresolutely. He had been rather taken aback by the suddenness with which the door had flown open, and had hesitated to enter, fearing a trap. The wild clatter of the stove-pipes had further disturbed him, and he had withdrawn to consider the situation. In one bound the girl was at the door and had shut it with a bang.

The problem was now to fix the latch so that it could not again be lifted from the outside. She lit one more precious match, examined the mechanism, and hunted frantically for a splinter of wood with which to jam it down. There was nothing in sight that would serve. She tried to tear off a strip of her petticoat to bind it down with, but all her underwear was of a most serviceable sturdiness, and would not tear. She heard the bear moving again outside. She heard his breathing close to the door. Desperately

she thrust a couple of fingers into the space above the latch, so that it would not lift. Then with the other hand she whipped off one shoe and stocking. The stocking was just the thing, and in a minute she had the latch secure.

It was no more than secure, however, before the weight of the bear once more came against the door. From the heavy, scratchy fumbings the girl could perceive that her enemy was trying to repeat his former manœuvre. On this point, at least, she had no anxiety. She knew the door could not now be unlatched from the outside. She could almost afford to laugh in her satisfaction as she groped her way back to her seat.

But her satisfaction was of brief life. The door began to creek more and more violently. It was evident that the bear, having once learned that this was a possible way in, was determined to test it to the utmost. The girl sprang up. She heard the screws of a hinge begin to draw with an ominous grating sound. Now at last the crisis was truly and inevitably upon her. And, to her amazement, she was less terrified

than before. The panic horror had all gone. She had small hope of escape, but her brain worked calmly and clearly. She moved over beside the broken stove, and stood, match in hand, ready to set fire to the pile of dry spruce tips.

The door groaned and creaked. Then the upper hinge gave way, and the door leaned inwards, admitting a wide streak of glimmer. For some moments, thereafter, all sounds ceased, as if the bear had drawn back cautiously to consider the result of his efforts. Then he came on again with more confidence. Under his weight the door came crashing down, but slowly, with the noise of yielding latch and snapping iron. As it fell, the girl scratched the match and set it to the dry stuff.

In the doorway the bear paused, eyeing suspiciously the tiny blue spurt of the struggling match. After a second or two, however, he came forward with a savage rush, furious at having been so long baulked. The girl slipped around the stove. And just as the bear reached the place where she had been standing, the spruce tips sparked sharply and flared up in his face. With a loud *wooo-*

oof of indignation and alarm, he recoiled, turned tail, scurried out into the road, and disappeared.

In a couple of minutes the cabin was full of sparks and smoky light. The girl ran to the door and peered out. Her heart sank once more. There was the bear, a few paces up the road, calmly sitting on his haunches, waiting. He had seen camp fires before, and he was waiting for this one to die down.

Sissy Bembridge knew that it would die down at once, and then—well, her last card would have been played. She wrung her hands, but in the new self-possession which had come to her, she could not believe that the end had really arrived. It was unbelievable that within some half a dozen minutes she should become a lifeless, hideous, shapeless thing beneath those mangling claws. No, there must be—there was—something to do, if she could only think of it.

And then it came to her.

At first thought the idea was so audacious, so startling, so fantastic, that she shrank from it as absurd. But on second thoughts she convinced herself not only that it was the one thing to be done, but also that it

was practical and would almost certainly prove effective. But there was not a moment to be lost.

Snatching up one of the fragments of stove-pipe, she used the edge as a shovel, and carried a portion of the blazing truff to the open doorway. Here she deliberately set fire to the dry woodwork, nursing with hand and breath the tiny uplicking flames. She fed them with a few more scraps of spruce, scraped up from another bunk, till she saw that they would surely catch. Then, with her stove-pipe shovel, she started another fire in the farther corner of the camp, and yet another in the uppermost bunk. When satisfied that all were fairly going, she retrieved her stocking from the broken latch, reclothed her naked foot, and set her bundle safely outside. Then she looked at the bear, still sitting on his haunches a little way up the road, and she laughed at him. At last she had him worsted. She darted in through the doorway—now blazing cheerfully all up one side—and dragged forth the heavy bench, that she might have something dry to sit on while she watched the approaching conflagration.

Her calculation—and she knew it was a sound one—was that the cabin, a solid structure of logs, would burn vigorously the whole night through, and terrify the bear to final flight. If it should by any chance die down before full daylight, she would be able to build a circle of small fires with the burning remnants. And she felt sure that in daylight her enemy would not dare to renew the attack.

In another ten minutes the roof was ablaze, and soon the flames were shooting up riotously. The woods were lighted redly for hundreds of yards around, the pools in the road were like polished copper, and the bear was nowhere to be seen. Sissy dragged her bench and bundle still farther away, and sat philosophically warming her wet feet. The reaction from her terror, and her sense of triumph, made her so excited that fatigue and anxiety were all forgotten. She grew warm and comfortable, and finally, opening her bundle, she got out a package of neglected sandwiches and made a contented meal.

As she was shaking the crumbs from her lap, she heard voices and pounding, splashing hoofs from up the trail. She sprang to her

feet. Three lumbermen came riding into the circle of light, and drew rein before her in astonishment. "Sissy—Bembridge—you!" cried the foremost, springing from his saddleless mount.

The girl ran to him. "Oh, Mike," she exclaimed, crying and laughing all at the same time, and clutching him by the arm, "I *had* to do it! The bear nigh got me! Take me to mother, quick. I'm *that* tired."

The Trailers

YOUNG Stan Murray turned on his heel and went into the house for his gun. His breast boiled with pity and indignation. The hired man, coming down from the Upper Field, had just told him that two more of his sheep had been killed by the bears. The sheep were of fine stock, only lately introduced to the out-settlements, and they were Stan's special charge. These two last made seven that the bears had taken within six weeks. Stan Murray, with the robust confidence of his eighteen years, vowed that the marauder, or marauders, should be brought to an accounting without more ado, though it should take him a week to trail them down. He stuffed some hard tack biscuits and a generous lump of cheese into his pockets, saw that his Winchester repeater was duly charged, buckled on his cartridge-belt, and started for the Upper Field.

The hired man led him to the scene of the tragedy. The two victims—both full-grown sheep—had been struck down close to the edge of the field, within a dozen yards of each other. Nothing was left of them there but their woolly skins and big splashes of darkened blood on the stiff turf of the pasture. The carcasses had evidently been dragged or carried off into the dark seclusion of the fir woods which bordered the top and farther side of the field. It was now just after mid-day, and Stan and the hired man agreed, after examination of all the signs, that the killing must have taken place early the previous night.

“It’s a long ways from here them b’ar’ll be by this time, I’m thinkin’,” said the hired man. Not a native of the backwoods, he was little versed in wilderness lore.

“Not at all,” corrected Murray. “Like as not they’re within a half mile or so of us now. They wouldn’t lug those fat sheep far. They’d just eat what they wanted an’ hide the rest in the bushes. And they’d come back an’ finish it up when they’d slept off the first feed. What would they want to

travel for, when they'd got such a dead easy thing right here?"

"Um-m-m!" grunted the hired man grudgingly. "Mebbe you're right. But I'd like to know who's been here afore us, an' *rolled up* this here skin so tidy-like? T'other skin's left all of a heap, mebbe because it's so torn 'tain't no good to nobody."

The young woodsman laughed, for all his vexation of spirit.

"Lot you know about bears, Tom," said he. "You see, there's been *two* bears here on this job, curse their dirty hides! One's a youngster, an' don't know much about skinning a sheep. He's just clawed off the skin any old way, an' made a mess of it, as you see. But the other's an old hand, evidently, an' knows what he's about—an old she, likely, an' perhaps mother of the young one. *She's* known how to *peel* off the skin, rolling it up that way quite as a man might do. Now, Tom, you get along back home, an' take the skins with you. I'm going after those two, an' I'm not coming home till I've squared up with 'em over this here deal."

For half a mile or more back into the

woods the trail of the marauders was a plain one to follow. Then Murray found the remnants of the two victims hidden in a mass of thick underbush, several yards apart. The tracks of the two bears encircled the spot, a plain proclamation of ownership to any other of the wild creatures which might be inclined to trespass on that domain. And on the trunk of a tall spruce, standing close beside the hiding-place, the initiated eyes of young Murray detected another warning to intruders. The bark at a considerable height was scored by the marks of mighty claws. The larger bear, after her meal, had stretched herself like a cat, rearing herself and digging in her claws against the trunk. And the great height of her reach was a pointed announcement that her displeasure would be a perilous thing to reckon with. As Stan Murray stood, estimating the stature of his foe, his eyes began to sparkle. This would be a trophy worth winning, the hide and head of such a bear. His wrath against the slayers of his sheep died away into the emulous zest of the hunter.

The bears, their hunger satisfied, had gone on straight back into the wilderness, instead

of hanging about the scene of their triumph or crawling into a neighbouring thicket, as Murray had expected, to sleep off their heavy feast. Murray thought he knew all about bears. As a matter of fact, he did know a lot about them. What he did *not* know was that no one, however experienced and sympathetic an observer, ever does achieve to know *all* about them. The bear is at the opposite pole from the sheep. He is an individualist. He does not care to do as his neighbour does. He is ever ready to adapt his habits, as well as his diet, to the varying of circumstance. He loves to depart from his rules and confound the naturalists. When you think you've got him, he turns out to be an old black stump, and laughs in his shaggy sleeve from some other hidden post of observation. He makes all the other kindred of the wild, except, perhaps, the shrewd fox, seem like foolish children beside him.

For a good hour Murray followed the trail of the two bears, at times with some difficulty, as the forest gave way in places to breadths of hard and stony barren, where the great pads left smaller trace. At last,

to his annoyance, in a patch of swamp, where the trail was very clear, he realized that he was now following one bear only, and that the smaller of the two. He cast assiduously from side to side, but in vain. He harked back along the trail for several hundred yards, but he could find no sign of the other bear, nor of where she had branched off. And it was just that other that he wanted. However, he decided that as the two were working together, he would probably find the second by keeping on after the first, rather than by questing at large for a lost trail. In any case, as he now reminded himself, it was not a trophy, but vengeance for his slaughtered sheep that he was out for.

The trail he had been following hitherto had been hours old. Now, of a sudden, he noticed with a start that it had become amazingly fresh—so fresh, indeed, that he felt he might come upon his quarry at any instant. How did it happen that the trail had thus grown fresh all at once? Decidedly puzzled, he halted abruptly and sat down upon a stump to consider the problem.

At last he came to the conclusion that, somewhere to his rear, the quarry must have

swerved off to one side or the other, either lain down for a brief siesta, or made a wide detour, then circled back into the old trail just a little way in advance of him. Again, it seemed, he had overshot the important and revealing point of the trail. He was nettled, disappointed in himself. His first impulse was to retrace his steps minutely, and try to verify this conclusion. Then he reflected that, after all, he had better content himself with the fact that he was now close on the heels of the fugitive, and vengeance, perhaps, almost within his grasp. To go back, for the mere sake of proving a theory, would be to lose his advantage. Moreover, the afternoon was getting on. He decided to push forward.

But now he went warily, peering to this side and to that, and scrutinizing every thicket, every stump and massive bole. He felt that he had been too confident, and made too much noise in his going. It was pretty certain that the quarry would by now be aware of the pursuit, and cunningly on guard. Twice he had been worsted in woodcraft. He was determined that the marauders should not score off him a third time.

For another half-hour he kept on, moving now as noiselessly as a mink, and watchfully as a wood-mouse. Yet the trail went on as before, and he could detect no sign that he was gaining on the elusive quarry. At last, grown suddenly conscious of hunger, he sat down upon a mossy stone and proceeded to munch his crackers and cheese. He was getting rather out of conceit with himself, and the meal, hungry though he was, seemed tasteless.

As he sat there, gnawing discontentedly at his dry fare, he began to feel conscious of being watched. The short hairs on the back of his neck tingled and rose. He looked around sharply, but he could see nothing. Very softly he rose to his feet. With minutest scrutiny his eyes searched every object within view. The mingled shadows of the forest were confusing, of course, but his trained eyes knew how to differentiate them. Nevertheless, neither behind, nor before, nor on either side could he make out any living thing, except a little black-and-white woodpecker, which peered at him with unwinking curiosity from a gnarled trunk a dozen feet away. From the wood-

pecker his glance wandered upwards and interrogated the lower branches of the surrounding trees. At last he made out the gleam of a pair of pale, malevolent eyes glaring down upon him from a high branch. Then he made out the shadowy shape, flattened close to the branch, of a large wild-cat.

Murray disliked the whole tribe of the wild-cats, as voracious destroyers of game and cunning depredators upon his poultry, and his rifle went instantly to his shoulder. But he lowered it again with a short laugh. He was not bothering just then with wild-cats. He cursed himself softly as "getting nervous," and sat down again to resume his meal, satisfied that the sensation at the back of his neck was now explained.

But he had not found the true explanation, by any means. In fact, he was fooled yet again.

From less than fifty yards ahead of him a little pair of red-rimmed eyes, half angry and half curious, were watching his every movement. Crouching behind two great trunks, his quarry was keeping him under wary observation, ready to slip onward like a

shadow, keeping to the shelter of the thicket and bole and rock, the moment he should show the least sign of taking up the trail again.

Moreover, from a slightly greater distance to his rear, another pair of little red-rimmed eyes, less curious and more angry, also held him under observation. For an hour or more, at least, the older bear had been trailing him in her turn with practised cunning. For all her immense bulk, she had never betrayed herself by so much as the crackling of a twig ; and the unconscious, complacent hunter was being hunted with a woodcraft far beyond his own. Whenever he stopped, or paused for the least moment, she came to a stop herself as instantly as if worked by the same nerve impulse, and stiffened into such stony immobility that she seemed at once to melt into her surroundings, and became invisible in the sense of being indistinguishable from them. Among mossy rocks she seemed to become a rock, among stumps a stump, among thickets a portion of the dark, shaggy undergrowth.

Having finished his crackers and cheese, Murray got up, brushed the crumbs from

his jacket, flicked a hard flake of bark contemptuously at the wild-cat—which darted farther up the tree with an angry growl—and once more took up the trail. He was beginning now to wonder if he was going to accomplish anything before the light should fail him, and he hurried on at a swifter pace. A few hundred yards farther, to his considerable gratification, the trail swept around in a wide curve towards the right, and made back towards the Settlement. “Perhaps,” he thought, “that fool of a bear does not know, after all, that I am on his track, and is going back for the remainder of his supper.”

Encouraged by this idea, he pushed on faster still.

Then, some ten minutes later, he had reason to regret his haste. Crossing a patch of soft, open ground, his attention was caught by the fact that the footprints he was following had miraculously increased in size. Examination proved that this was no illusion. And now, for the first time, an unpleasant feeling crept over him. Apparently he was being played with. The second bear, it was evident, had slipped in and taken

the place of the first, copying an old game of the hunted foxes.

Murray suddenly felt himself alone and outwitted. If it had been earlier in the day, he would not have cared ; but now it would soon be night. He had no great dread of bears, as a rule. He was willing to tackle several of them at once, as long as he had his Winchester and a clear chance to use it—but after dark he would be at a grievous disadvantage. If the trail had still been leading away from home, he would probably have turned back and planned for an early start again next morning. But as his enemy was going in the right direction, he decided to follow on as fast as possible, and see if he might not succeed in obtaining a decision before dark.

The trail was now almost insolently clear, and he followed it at a lope. He gained no glimpse of the quarry even at this pace ; but at least he had the satisfaction of knowing, from the increased heaviness of the footprints and the lengthening of the stride, that he was forcing his adversary to make haste. Presently it appeared that this was displeasing to the adversary. The trail went off to the

left, at a sharp angle, and made for a dense cedar swamp, which Murray had no desire to adventure into at that late hour. He decided to give up the chase for the day and keep straight for home.

By this time Murray felt that his knowledge of bears was not quite so profound as he had fancied it to be. Nevertheless, he was sure of one thing. He was ready to gamble on it that, as soon as they realized he had given up trailing them, they would turn and trail him. The idea was more or less depressing to him in his present mood. He did not greatly care, however, so long as it was fairly light. He did not think that his adversaries would have the rashness to attack him even after dark, the black bear having a very just appreciation of man's power. Still, there was the chance, and it gave him something to think of. He made a hurried estimate of the distance he had yet to go, and it was with a distinct sense of relief he concluded that he would make the open fields before the closing in of dark.

The woods at this point were somewhat thick, an abundant second growth of spruce and fir. Presently they fell away before him,

revealing a few acres of windy grass-land surrounding a deserted cabin. At the sight of the space of open ground Murray was seized with a new idea. His face brightened, his self-confidence returned. The bears had, so far, outdone him thoroughly in woodcraft. Well, he would now show them that he was their master in tactics.

He ran staggeringly out into the field, and fell as if exhausted. He lay for a few seconds, to make sure he was observed by his antagonists, then picked himself up, raced on across the open as fast as he could, and plunged into the thick woods on the opposite side.

As soon as he was hidden, he turned and looked behind him. The growth of bushes and rank herbage which fringed the other side of the clearing whence he had come was waving and tossing with the movement of heavy bodies. For a few moments he thought that his pursuers, grown bold with his flight, would break forth from their concealment and follow across the clearing. In that case he might count on bagging them both.

But no, they were too wary still for that. Presently the tossing of the bushes began to

separate, and moved rapidly both to right and left along the skirts of the clearing. A smile of triumph spread over Murray's face.

"My turn at last!" he muttered, and ran noiselessly, keeping well hidden, down toward the left-hand corner of the field. He had an idea that it was the bigger bear which was coming to meet him in that direction, because the movement of the bushes had seemed the more violent on that side. He was himself again fully now, the zest of the hunter swallowing up all other emotions.

Just at the corner of the field, behind a heap of stones half buried in herbage, he hid himself, and lay motionless, with his rifle at his shoulder and finger on the trigger. He could hear the bear coming, for she was running more carelessly now, under the impression that the enemy was in full flight. Dry branches snapped, green branches swished and rustled, and occasionally his straining ears caught the sound of a heavy but muffled footfall.

She was almost upon him, however, before he could actually get a view of her. She came out into a space between two clumps of young fir trees, not twenty-five yards from



"She came out into a space between two clumps of young fir trees
... offering a perfect mark."

The Secret Trails]

his hiding-place, and was just passing him diagonally, offering a perfect mark. Murray's finger closed, softly and steadily, on the trigger. The heavy, soft-nosed bullet crashed through her neck, and she dropped, collapsing on the instant into nothing more than a heap of rusty-black fur.

Immensely elated, his dear sheep avenged, and his standing as a hunter vindicated at last, young Murray strode over and examined his splendid prize. It was by far the biggest black bear he had ever seen. To the other of the pair he gave not a thought ; he knew that the crack of his rifle would have cured it of any further curiosity it might have had about himself. He took out his handkerchief, tied it to the end of a stick, and stuck the stick into the ground beside the heap of fur, to serve both as a mark and as a warning to possible trespassers. Then he made haste home, to fetch a lantern and the hired man, for he would not leave so splendid a skin all night to the mercies of fox and fisher and weasel and other foragers of the dark.

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